

Hail to the UMass band

By Zach Oelschlegel, Collegian Columnist
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Senior Day is always a time when we can honor those among us who have just completed their final season. It's the time to tip our hats and thank them for the good times. It's the time to hug them and wish them well as they move on with their lives. It's a bittersweet day for players, excited about being able to play one last time, yet sad that this is the beginning of the end.

Nov. 22 was Senior Day at the University of Massachusetts, where we honored those football players that dedicated their last four years to the glorification of our school.

Unfortunately, a few seniors were forgotten, and they weren't the linebackers or quarterbacks. While the football team did have an excellent season, there is a group of people that always has an outstanding season, yet they are typically an afterthought to the ignorant majority of campus. They are none other than our Minuteman Marching Band, the unsung heroes of UMass.

Never before have I seen such a hardworking team of students. They come to school a full week early for band camp (not counting the drummers who come back to school two weeks early and run laps around the field with those big 50-pound drums attached to their torsos).

It's not as if band camp is some easy thing. First thing in the morning, at 8 a.m., is practice, followed by practice, and maybe some more practice, all of which ends no earlier than 11 p.m. The band members wake up for the next six days to do it all again in what is one of the most grueling camps at UMass.

And you thought the athletes were the only ones who had to go through two-a-days.

Then, during the school year, the band has practice every day for an hour-and-a-half, and they will even sacrifice a large portion of the weekend doing what they do best.

Game days begin at 7 a.m., followed by another four hours of practice, and then the band wakes the hung-over students of Southwest with their Saturday ritual of marching through the Quad to play a few ditties at the Pyramids next to John Quincy Adams and Washington towers. On days when the football team is on the road, the band can be found 300 miles away, either at the game or playing in cities as random as Allentown, Pa.

Instead of sleeping in lavish hotels, the band usually winds up sleeping on hardwood gym floors. But are there any comments or complaints about their modest sleeping accommodations? Nah. In truth, the band relishes the idea of being stuck inside cramped buses, and the members are proud of their ability to sleep on floors more uncomfortable than Oprah when she wears spandex (unless, of course, the trumpets decide that pelting everyone else with water balloons is a good idea). It all begins and ends with humility.

And that's what it's all about. The band is almost never the main event. They aren't the ones scoring the touchdowns; they're the ones cheering those guys on. There aren't any band prima

donnas; the talk around campus isn't about our star tuba section (although maybe it should be). They don't need to pad their stats to prove they are up to snuff.

In fact, what they really are is just a group of the most remarkable, fun-loving people you will meet. They don't put in 15 hours of work a week for a measly two-credit GPA booster or some scholarship; they do it for UMass.

No one shows that they love our school like the band does, and it shows when they strut their stuff on that football field seven times throughout the year. How many people can you point your finger at and say they care more about something other than themselves?

In conclusion, I'd like to congratulate the football team on a great season, and I can't wait to go and cheer for them next season. But I'd also like to tell the football team to go and thank the band for always screaming, hissing and being the only crazy people at the game.

So football players and anyone else that reads this: go and do yourself and your university a favor the next time you hear someone utter the phrase, "band geek." Walk right up to that guy and say, "Hey, buddy, I think you meant band stud."

Those studs have done more for our school than we'll ever imagine. Maybe next time they should be the ones we congratulate for having a dazzling season.