

For this gentle giant, playing in the NFL is just a job.

an atypical athlete

Story by Mitzi Lutz
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Everything's bigger in Texas, and Texans will be the first to tell you that. They've got big belt buckles, the big D and big hearts. So because of his size alone, Seth Wand '03 fits right in. At 6-foot-7 and 320 pounds, he wears a size 16 shoe, and his size 20 wedding ring was custom made with a hinge to accommodate his massive knuckles. His favorite snack? A steak dinner at midnight.

Size definitely matters in Texas, and that's one reason why the NFL's Houston Texans are counting on the big offensive left tackle to create some on-field magic and let the rest of the league know they don't mess with Texas.

The third-round draft pick is the first Northwest graduate to have a starting position in the NFL, and as such, he has a multi-million dollar responsibility – protecting the blindside of quarterback David Carr.

But other than his NFL build, big No. 78, or Wando as his teammates call him, defies the stereotype of a professional athlete in the public consciousness.

For one thing, playing in the NFL was not a childhood dream for Wand. In fact, he doesn't consider himself a sports fan.

"I never watched football growing up," he said. "I never had a favorite team or player because I just didn't follow it. I never played football until my brother played in high school, and I only played because he did. I was good at it, so I kept on playing, and then I got a scholarship to Northwest and all of a sudden I'm drafted, and now here I am in the NFL."

"There are only 53 guys on the Texans, and there are probably 53,000 guys who wish they could be on an NFL team. Playing on this level is just not something I

thought about when I was growing up."

Unlike the outspoken, flashy athletes often seen on the highlight shows, he's shy, laidback, soft spoken and down to earth. He drives a GMC pickup truck, has a soft spot for cats and spends his free time playing video games.

"The only reason I know the NFL teams, what divisions they are in and some of the big time players is from playing football video games as a kid," Wand said. "Joe Montana on the video games would be really good, and when he threw the ball to Jerry Rice, Rice would always catch it."

Above all, he has remained level-headed – especially considering a few years ago he was sacking groceries and now has a three-year contract that nets a seven-figure income.

"He's as nice, as gentle and as kind of a human being as you'll ever find. But you don't have a starting position in the NFL if you're not a physical specimen who's mentally and physically tough."

– NORTHWEST OFFENSIVE LINE COACH BART TATUM



Seth Wand (left) prevents San Diego's Steve Foley from gaining access to the Texans quarterback.



Whether at home or in the Texans players' lounge, Wand enjoys playing the video game Halo.



A rigorous weight training program allows Wand to maintain his enormous size and strength.



Before coming to Northwest, Wand was a “small” 240-pound defensive lineman at Springfield’s Catholic High School, and “all I ever did was run over everybody,” he said.

Northwest’s coaching staff convinced him his body was built for the offensive line.

They knew what they were talking about.

“Besides his massive size, he’s got feet like a ballerina,” said Northwest offensive line coach Bart Tatum who persuaded Wand to give Northwest a shot. “He’s very diligent and treats football like a craft. All you have to do is tell him something one time and he’ll remember it and execute it on the field.”

The coach/athlete relationship has progressed to a friendship. Wand and Tatum continue to talk on the phone every week.

“He’s as nice, as gentle and as kind of a human being as you’ll ever find,” Tatum said. “But, you don’t have a starting position in the NFL if you’re not a physical specimen who’s mentally and physically tough.”

Wand allowed only one sack at Northwest in his three seasons as a starter at left



Seth and Beth Reuters Wand, who met at Northwest, are expecting their first child – a boy – in March. Considering Beth is 6-foot and Seth is 6-foot-7, Seth’s agent claims he has “first dibs” on the future athlete.

tackle and garnered many o-line accolades throughout his college career. He was named an All-American first team selection by the NFL Draft Report and competed in the 2003 Senior Bowl – a game featuring the country’s best senior collegiate football players and top NFL draft prospects.

“I think I got the NFL coaches’ attention when I played in the Senior Bowl,”

Wand said. “I had a good first day of practice, and I played well in the game. That was probably my big break.”

During his senior year at Northwest, Wand was flooded with phone calls, letters and packages from agents throughout the country wanting to represent him.

Wand’s life was soon on the fast track. With a well-respected agent and skills

that caught the scouts’ attention, Wand and Beth Reuters ’02, ’03, whom he later married, flew to New York City for the NFL draft.

“When it was announced that I was picked in the third round by the Texans, ESPN was on a commercial break. When they returned to the TV coverage, it was like ‘oh yeah, and the Texans drafted Seth Wand from Northwest Missouri State.’ I immediately got a bunch of phone calls and everything was a whirlwind.”

The chaos quickly settled, and the next week Wand was back in Maryville to take his finals and attend the commencement ceremony in Bearcat Arena where he graduated with a degree in management information systems.

As a rookie last season, Wand not only had to learn unfamiliar plays and NFL routines, he also had to endure a rite of passage – hazing. Fortunately for him, the Texans have only been around for two years so there’s not a long tradition of pranks on the young guys.

“Last year, every time we traveled for

a road game, I had to go get the entire offensive line 100 chicken tenders from Popeye’s Chicken right after the game,” he said. “I was fast and efficient and got a lot of compliments from the line, so I guess I won some points with them. On some teams they tie the rookies to the goal post or throw you in the cold tub or make you stand up and sing. It’s all in good fun, but I’m glad I didn’t have to do anything like that.”

Despite the minor hazing, Wand’s teammates have welcomed him to the team.

“The offensive line is a pretty close group of guys,” he said. “We try to go out to dinner once a week, and we play video games in the players lounge every chance we get. It’s encouraging for me to be around these guys because they have such good character. Everyone on the team is there for one single purpose – to help each other win football games.”

Other than winning football games, the Houston Texans also expect their players to perform community service – something

Wand said he enjoys.

“Last year I went to a hospital and talked to some kids and also to a school,” he said. “Grandma (Barbara) Bush was there, so that was pretty cool. I’ve been to several events where you sign autographs; I recently participated in an airplane towing contest; and I’ve been a part of a deal where people pay several hundred dollars a plate just to sit and eat with a Texans player.”

While signing autographs, rubbing elbows with high profile personalities and a comfortable lifestyle are all part of the job, Wand only seeks one thing.

“I just want respect from my peers,” he said.

“That, and a Super Bowl ring would be nice,” Beth quickly added.

They’ll have to make that ring custom, of course. Size 20. ■

bearcat all-stars

Seth Wand isn’t the only success story to emerge from the Coach Mel Tjeerdsma Era at Northwest.

TONY MILES '00

- Starting receiver for Canadian Football League’s Toronto Argonauts
- Named All-CFL last season



ALAN BUCKWALTER '00

- Played preseason as a linebacker with NFL’s Cincinnati Bengals
- Works as a firefighter with the Kansas City Fire Department



DAVE PURNELL '99

- Played three years in the Arena Football League as a place kicker for the Des Moines Barnstormers
- Works as a firefighter with the Southern Platte Fire Protection District

CURT LESSMAN '02

- Center for NFL’s Atlanta Falcons in 2002; center for Arena Football League’s Chicago Rush and Charlotte Cobras in 2003; fullback/linebacker for Columbus Destroyers in 2004
- Currently coaches at Northwest while completing master’s degree



JESSE HAYNES '01

- Running back for two years for the NFL’s Kansas City Chiefs
- Currently is Northwest’s coordinator for minority affairs

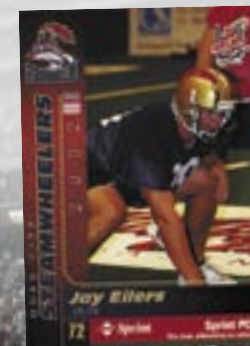
CHRIS GREISEN '99

- Quarterback for the NFL’s Arizona Cardinals and Washington Redskins
- Played one year for the Rhein Fire in NFL Europe
- Started clinic for young athletes and coaches high school football
- Working to regain a position in the NFL



T.J. SCHNECKLOTH '01

- Defensive end/linebacker in Arena 2 League Football with Quad City Steamwheelers
- Currently teaches fifth grade and coaches offensive and defensive lines North Scott High School in Eldridge, Iowa



JAY EILERS '99

- Offensive and defensive lineman for Arena 2 League Football with Quad City Steamwheelers
- Currently teaches physical education and serves as head football coach for Albany High School

