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Blaze Band drummer doesn't miss a beat

While mom marches, freshman makes music

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Blackman Blaze Marching Band member Michael Stanaland and his mother Renae Stanaland march in formation with the rest of the band during halftime at Siegel High School on Friday. / John A. Gillis/DNJ

Written by Samantha E. Williams sewilliams@dnj.com

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MURFREESBORO — Being a freshman in high school is difficult enough with learning the ropes of a new school full of all-new teachers, classmates and classes.

Add in taking the leap from middle school concert band to high school marching band and you stack on learning drill charts, show music and pep music on top of your regular curriculum.

But Michael Stanaland was ready to face these challenges head-on.

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As a child with cerebral palsy, he's faced plenty of obstacles before. And just because he has to use a [wheelchair](#) to get around doesn't mean he was going to let anything stand in his way of his passion for music and playing drums.

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"He started band in the sixth grade with his (twin) sister, Allie, at Stewarts Creek Middle School," said Michael's mom, Renae Stanaland. "We went and talked to the Blackman band directors, Ms. (Brenda) Monson and Mr. (Ben) Frasier, in May about Michael wanting to be in the marching band."

Michael's mother was a little apprehensive about what the response would be due to Michael's situation. His physical disability also affects his right arm making it practically impossible to

play percussion with both hands.

But she wanted her son to have a chance to experience band, and not just be pushed over to the side as a member of the group but not really a part of the group.

"We didn't have any reservations about him being a part of the marching band," said Monson. "We just said this is what we need to do."

What they needed to do was figure out how to move Michael from place to place in the drill patterns the band marches. Throughout his normal day-to-day classes, Michael uses a motorized chair in which he uses his left hand to operate. However, Michael needs his strong left hand to play, which meant someone would have to push him from form to form on the field.

Mom was ready to take on the challenge with her son.

Frasier refers to Michael and Renae as "Team Stanaland."


"Their attitude is great," he said.

The first struggle to overcome was Blackman High School's band camp during the summer. Having been a cheerleader in high school, Renae Stanaland did not have the same musical talents that her children showed.


"Outside of the heat, learning drill was difficult. It was like reading Japanese. But the kids showed us, 'This is where you are supposed to be,'" Renae Stanaland said.


"We sweated profusely," Michael said of those early rehearsals. "It's a lot more challenging than I thought it would be."

And yet all the effort is worth it when Michael takes the field with his

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fellow band students.

Decked out in his orange and blue uniform Friday night, he held his drumstick in position with all the other percussionists.

Just in time for the big rival game against Siegel High School, Michael's friends Matthew Vick and Webster Hunt "blazed" his chair complete with blue tape, Blackman High logos on the wheels, and blue and orange [LED lights](#) that flashed in time with his beats.

As Renae controlled the wheels, moving her son from one drill set to the next, Michael focused on the drum major and tapped out the rhythms on a snare pad hooked to his chair. His head bobbed a bit as he jammed through the percussion break, and he grinned as the audience responded with cheers and applause.

"Being in marching band is way different," Michael said. "Being on the field is way cool. I love playing for the fans."

"We've never met people who accepted Michael, or us, so wonderfully," said Renae Stanaland. "This is as close to 'normal' as we've ever been."

"We want everyone to have the chance to learn music and be a part of the marching band," Monson said.

"He is an inspiration to others. He is proof that if you want to do something, you can do it," Frasier added.



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