

Mark Vincent Pelini Foundation

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE AWARD



Former Cardinal Mooney High School and University of Nebraska Center Mark Pelini was a man of discipline, courage, faith, purpose and character.

MARK VINCENT PELINI AUGUST 27, 1991 – OCTOBER 2, 2022

As a teammate, he was a leader, a challenger, a fierce competitor and a friend. As a son of God, he was spiritual, fair, kind and inquisitive. As a son and brother, he was loyal and loving and invested.

In paying homage to Mark's legacy, the Mark Vincent Pelini Foundation is proud to add the MVP Center of Excellence Award to its list of initiatives in line with their mission to impact the community and the youth of tomorrow in Mark's name.

The MVP Center of Excellence Award will be presented to an outstanding Mahoning, Trumbull, Columbiana, Summit and Stark County Offensive Lineman (Center) who excel on the field, in the classroom and in the community. He should be a leader. He should have courage and compassion, faith and integrity. He should excel on the field, in the classroom in the community.

Congratulations to all of the MVP Center of Excellence Award 2024 finalists

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2024 Finalists

Andrew Brian, South Range (Head Coach: Dave Rach)

Jymier Burrage, Valley Christian (Head Coach: Andrew Hake)

DeAndre Copeland, Buchtel (Head Coach: Bryan Williams)

Nate Cross, Archbishop Hoban (Head Coach: Tim Tyrell)

Matthew DeSciscio, Walsh Jesuit (Head Coach: Nick Alexander)

Mikey Eckman, Salem (Head Coach: Ron Johnson)

Teigan Essig, Jackson (Head Coach: Jay Rohr)

Dalton Johnson, East Palestine (Head Coach: Michael Demster)

Ethan Laslo, JFK Catholic (Head Coach: Damon Buente)

Weston Little, Sandy Valley (Head Coach: Brian Gamble)

Hayden Martin, West Branch (Head Coach: Tim Cooper)

Nolan McKendry, Green (Head Coach: Mark Geis)

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2024 Selection Committee

Bo Pelini

Michael Zordich

Alex Zordich

Donald D'Alesio

Zach Larson

Tom Velasquez

Tim Marlowe

Nico Mancuso

"Thank you to all of the head coaches who took the time to nominate players. It is a pleasure to showcase the efforts, talents, character and leadership of these outstanding young men."

MVP COE Selection Committee

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**2024
FINALIST**

#53 Andrew Brian
South Range
Head Coach: Dave Rach

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2024
FINALIST **#53 Andrew Brian**
South Range
Head Coach: Dave Rach

"Andrew Brian is a standout student-athlete for the South Range Raiders. Andrew excels both on and off of the gridiron. As a two-way starter on the offensive and defensive lines, his value to his team cannot be overstated. On offense, Andrew excelled as a two-year starter at center, where he anchored an offensive line that paved the way for a run-first offense that has averaged 37 points per game during his time as the starter.

Andrew completed his senior campaign with an overall career record of 55-4, which includes 2 Regional Championships, 4 undefeated Northeast 8 Conference Championships, and a Division 5 State Championship. His vocal leadership was complemented by his intensity and focus in practice on a daily basis. Andrew always took his job seriously and strived to be the very best he could be. He expected the same from his teammates.

In the spring, Andrew doubles as a multi-sport athlete on the South Range baseball team. Outside of athletics, Andrew's dedication to excellence continues, as he boasts a 3.9 grade point average. He was also voted Treasurer of the National Honor Society by his peers. His impact on the South Range community, his teammates, his family, and the Raider Football program is one that will prove to be both lasting and immeasurable." Coach Dave Rach

"I am a senior at South Range High School. I am a three-year letter winner on the varsity football team and a three-year letter winner on the varsity baseball team. I am a member of the key club, spirit club, student council, and National honor society. I was recently nominated to represent South Range High School at the 2024 rotary youth leadership conference. After High school, I plan to attend college and continue my football career. My goal is to major in biology and pursue a career as a physician assistant. I would like to thank my parents Melissa and Randy Brian, as well as my sister Lola and numerous friends and family for their endless support during my time at South Range Schools." Andrew Brian

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**2024
FINALIST**

#75 Jymier Burrage
Valley Christian
Head Coach: Andrew Hake

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2024
FINALIST **#75 Jymier Burrage**
Valley Christian
Head Coach: Andrew Hake

"I am a senior at Valley Christian High School. I have attended VCS all four years of high school and was a starter in football for two years. I have earned a cumulative GPA of 3.4 and have been honored for several academic achievements. I earned 1st team all EOAC conference, honorable mention all NEO inland and was named to the All YSN team. I plan on attending college to study accounting. I want to thank my mom, friends, teammates and coaches for all they have done for me. Lastly, I want to thank the Mark Vincent Pelini Foundation for accepting me as a nomination for the MVP Center of Excellence Award." Jymierr Burrage

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**2024
FINALIST**

#59 DeAndre Copeland
Buchtel
Head Coach: Bryan Williams

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**2024
FINALIST**

**#59 DeAndre Copeland
Buchtel
Head Coach: Bryan Williams**

Center/Guard/D-Tackle

4 Year Varsity Starter

4x 1st Team All City (League)

3x All District (NEO-Inland)

4x All-Academic

1x All Ohio

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**2024
FINALIST**

#54 Nate Cross
Archbishop Hoban
Head Coach: Tim Tyrrell

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**2024
FINALIST**

#54 Nate Cross
Archbishop Hoban
Head Coach: Tim Tyrrell

"NATE is a 3-time All Ohio Center who graded out at 93% over his 4-year career. He is a 4-year starter with a 3.3 GPA. Nate has devoted over 40 hours of service at Haven of Rest. He is a student ambassador. Nate committed to Kent State in December, and we look forward to following his football career as a Golden Flash." Coach Tim Tyrrell

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**2024
FINALIST**

#76 Matthew DeSciscio

Walsh Jesuit

Head Coach: Nick Alexander

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**2024
FINALIST**

#76 Matthew DeSciscio
Walsh Jesuit
Head Coach: Nick Alexander

"Matthew DeSciscio is a standout student-athlete and leader at Walsh Jesuit, known for his exceptional dedication both on and off the field. Over the past two years, Matthew started 28 consecutive games as a key player on the offensive line, where he helped lead his team to set a school record in rushing yards with an impressive 4,196 yards in 2024. His leadership and work ethic earned him the honor of being named a Team Captain for the 2024 season.

In addition to his athletic achievements, Matthew has been deeply involved in his school's extracurricular activities. He serves as an active member of the school newspaper, a Green Team Leader promoting sustainability initiatives, and a Kairos Retreat Leader, guiding his peers in spiritual reflection and growth. He is also a Senior Leader in the WJ program, where he helps mentor younger students. Outside of his leadership roles, Matthew is a committed member of the Men's Volleyball Team.

Despite his busy schedule, Matthew has excelled academically, maintaining an outstanding 4.02 GPA throughout his high school career, showcasing his remarkable balance of academic, athletic, and leadership responsibilities." Coach Nick Alexander

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2024 #62 **Mikey Eckman**
FINALIST Salem
Head Coach: Ron Johnson

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2024 #62 **Mikey Eckman**
FINALIST Salem
Head Coach: Ron Johnson

"Mikey Eckman is the poster child for perseverance. He has been in our program for 12-years and has always dreamed of being a Quaker. His stature limited him in the younger grades and into junior high, but it couldn't keep him off of the field because of his relentless work ethic and desire to play. Entering high school Mikey found the weight room and committed to strength and conditioning. He worked himself into an opportunity to get on the field when he made the switch to center and, due to his athleticism, became moderately successful early in his career. Mikey had an incredible year in the weight room entering his junior year and became our starting center. Week 1 against Poland he suffered a significant knee injury. He braced it and played through Week 8 until he was forced to have reconstructive ACL surgery. The team rallied around him and through encouragement and personal challenges they stoked his fire to come back better than ever. Devastated, but not destroyed, Mikey again attacked the weight room and rehabbed his knee back to full strength while keeping a positive and laser-focused attitude. This year he hit the field with great appreciation and anchored an offensive line that allowed his team to rush for over 250-yards and score 30-points a game. Mikey brought a two-fisted toughness to the game that was respected by both his teammates and his opponents. His effort and performance culminated in being named 1st Team All-Eastern Buckeye Conference; and earning Academic All-EBC honors with a perfect 4.0 grade point average. Mikey is extremely proud of what he has accomplished as well as the journey he had to take to make it happen. He now has his sights set on the next challenge - of playing college football and earning a degree." Coach Ron Johnson

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**2024
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#51 Teigen Essig
Jackson
Head Coach: Jay Rohr

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2024
FINALIST **#51 Teigen Essig**
Jackson
Head Coach: Jay Rohr

"Teigen Essig's passion for sports began at an early age. Starting at just five years old, he immersed himself in baseball and football, and his love for athletics has only grown since.

As a two-year starter and two-year Varsity letter winner for the Polar Bears, Teigen has demonstrated exceptional leadership both on and off the field. As our offensive center, he exemplified an outstanding work ethic, a deep understanding of the game, and an unwavering commitment to improving his skills. Whether it was through his countless hours of practice or the over one thousand extra snaps after regular practice sessions, Teigen continuously pushed himself to elevate his performance and help the team.

This dedication contributed to leading the team to its first league championship since 2017 and only the second since 2001. Beyond his achievements on the field, Teigen has set an incredible example of sportsmanship, perseverance, and teamwork, inspiring everyone around him. What makes his accomplishments even more remarkable is that he achieved all of this while managing a diagnosis of Crohn's disease.

In the classroom, Teigen's excellence is equally impressive. He has maintained a remarkable 4.54 GPA, all while taking a challenging schedule full of Advanced Placement and College Credit Plus courses. His leadership in academics is evident, as he has served as a tutor, helping his peers excel in their own studies.

Teigen's future is just as bright as his present. He plans to attend The Ohio State University, where he will pursue a Pre-Medicine degree. His ultimate goal, fueled by his love for sports and helping others, is to become an Orthopedic Surgeon.

Outside of athletics and academics, Teigen gives back to his community in numerous ways. He has volunteered at Jackson Wrestling tournaments alongside the athletic training staff, worked at the Jackson Youth Football Camp, and served as a certified umpire for baseball and softball. His work as an umpire has supported nonprofit organizations that raise funds for research and programs benefiting children with physical and mental challenges.

Teigen also spends time mentoring elementary students at his former school and is currently working through the process of becoming a volunteer with the Northern Ohio Chapter of the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation, where he hopes to support other athletes navigating similar challenges.

Teigen Essig is a shining example of what it means to be a Polar Bear: dedicated, compassionate, and driven to succeed. It is a privilege to recognize his many achievements and contributions." Coach Jay Rohr

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**2024
FINALIST**

#72 Dalton Johnson
East Palestine
Head Coach: Michael Demster

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**2024
FINALIST**

#72 Dalton Johnson
East Palestine
Head Coach: Michael Demster

"Dalton Johnson has been a 4-year starter for the East Palestine High School football team. In addition to his role as our starting center for the past 4 years, Dalton has also been voted as a weightlifter of the year this past season, was a captain as both a junior and a senior and was selected as an honorable mention All-EOAC performer. Dalton is one of the most respected members of our team, and also one of our hardest workers. Dalton has been an integral part of our rebuilding of the football team in East Palestine. Dalton's class went 0-10 as freshmen starters, and he and his classmates worked to ensure they made the playoffs as seniors. After the train derailment in 2023, Dalton was instrumental in keeping our team together. His leadership and work ethic set the tone for the rest of the program, and it allowed us to overcome the adversity we were all dealt as a community. This season, he has been one of our most consistent linemen, and the best center in Columbiana County. Dalton will be next to impossible to replace when he leaves next year, not just because of his ability as a football player, but also his ability to lead his classmates and team in everything we do. Dalton holds our team accountable, handling the discipline after practices, and ensuring that our team is watching opponent film each week. On game nights, Dalton is a huge asset, as he not only performs his job, but assists in play calling as well. His football IQ and intellect allow him to see the field and relay the necessary information to me to call plays. His blocking ability has paved the way for our quarterback to rush for 2,042 yards and 30 touchdowns in the regular season. In addition, he helped our tailback amass almost 600 yards rushing as well. Losing Dalton will be a huge setback for our front five, but his play over the past four season has helped put East Palestine football back on the map, and for that, I am forever grateful for him." Coach Demster

"I am the son of Albert and Tammy Johnson. I am a 4-year starter at East Palestine High School and have received awards for Second Team All-County and First Team Quad-County. I have been a 2-year captain as well as two-time All-EOAC selection and two-time weightlifter of the year. I have played football since middle school and have grown to be part of a great football team, I would not be able to accomplish the things I have done without my family, coaches, and teammates."
Dalton Johnson

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**2024
FINALIST**

#52 Ethan Laslo

John F. Kennedy Catholic

Head Coach: Damon Buente

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**2024
FINALIST**

#52 Ethan Laslo

John F. Kennedy Catholic

Head Coach: Damon Buente

"I am a Senior at Warren John F. Kennedy Catholic High School with a 4.5 GPA and a 35 ACT score. At JFK, I am the President of Student Government, a Captain of the football team, 3-year letterman on the baseball team, a 2-time state qualifier and national qualifier on the speech and debate team, and a winner of the Regional Outstanding Attorney Award on the mock trial team. For community service, I am a member of JFK's SOAR Service Club and Relay for Life Team, along with frequently being involved with the GameChangers organization and volunteering at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel's annual Summer estival. My future plan is to attend college next fall to pursue a law degree." Ethan Laslo

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**2024
FINALIST**

**# 75 Weston Little
Sandy Valley
Head Coach: Brian Gamble**

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**2024
FINALIST** **# 75 Weston Little**
Sandy Valley
Head Coach: Brian Gamble

"Wes was our starting center the past 3 years in a Shotgun Pistol Offense. He is undoubtedly our best leader and the anchor of our offensive line. We would pull our center a lot in our run game because of his mobility and tenacity to finish blocks. Wes finished his career as a 1st Team IVC, 1st Team Eastern, & 1st Team All Stark County (voted as the top Center). Wes is a natural leader, and he possesses all the positive ingredients necessary for success."

Coach Brian Gamble

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**2024
FINALIST**

#55 Hayden Martin
West Branch
Head Coach: Tim Cooper

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2024
FINALIST **#55 Hayden Martin**
West Branch
Head Coach: Tim Cooper

Hayden is a West Branch High School 2-year starter, 2-year letter winner, 2nd Team All-Conference, Honorable Mention NEO Inland, Honorable Mention Quad County. He is an active leader in Fellowship of Christian Athletes and has a 3.5 GPA. Hayden helps with youth at North Benton Presbyterian Church, participates in the winter rec basketball league and lifting, he loves attending Tennessee Volunteer Football Games. Parents Cheri & Gary Martin, Brother Garrison Martin.

"Hayden is a two-year starter at center for West Branch. He has started in 25 games over the two years. He was a very important piece in the two-year span where we went 22-3 over the past two seasons. Our offense averaged over 40 points per game and was able to have success both through the air and on the ground. He was a large part in the production of the offense because of his perfect snaps and assignment sound blocking. We were able to produce the schools all time leading rusher and all-time leading receiver over those seasons. Hayden also was our long and short snapper this past season and was consistent with his snaps in that role as well. Hayden was a quiet player but always did the right thing. He is a very religious kid and is soft spoken, but he would do anything for his teammates and anything that a coach asked him to do. He played scout team center all season and never complained. Hayden was a big reason why we were able to have success on defense - because of the looks he provided throughout the week. He was the ultimate teammate. He will be missed." Coch Tim Cooper

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**2024
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#54 Nolan McKendry

Green

Head Coach: Mark Geis

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2024 **#54 Nolan McKendry**
FINALIST **Green**
Head Coach: Mark Geis

"Nolan has been a member of our football program from youth football all the way through varsity. In that time, he has proven to be a great leader who has tremendous faith and work ethic in the classroom and on the football field. As a two time All Federal League player and a two-time captain of our football team, Nolan was one of the most respected players we have had in our program. I personally noticed his work ethic firsthand as he began training with our team as a young 7th grader. That fearless thirteen-year-old turned into a strong, competitive, and dependable leader as our center. Starting for two seasons, Nolan was a force to be reckoned with in one of the toughest leagues in Ohio. Nolan led his team as the starting center to a Regional Finals appearance in 2023 and to the second round of the playoffs in 2024.

Academically, Nolan has taken his work ethic to the classroom as he has participated in Honors and AP levels courses throughout high school. One afternoon this past spring highlighted the importance of academics in Nolan's life. Nolan was waiting on his ACT scores to be released for a few days, and he had asked in the middle of a team lift if he could check his phone for an ACT email. Sure enough, Nolan came running into our weight room holding his phone in the air and celebrating with his teammates. Nolan found out that day that he had earned a score of 35 on his ACT, and his entire team was cheering for him that afternoon.

Finally, Nolan's faith is a huge part of who he is as a young man. I will not speak for him, but if you asked, he would probably say his faith defines him. He is an outspoken Christian man, which is not easy to be in a public-school setting in our society. Nolan's faith has led even his teammates to notice. This most recent Sunday, I even noticed Nolan sitting in the balcony of our church. Being the great leader and recruiter that he is, he brought five of his teammates with him that Sunday. Needless to say, Nolan's faith drives him to be successful in every path of his life."
Coach Mark Geis

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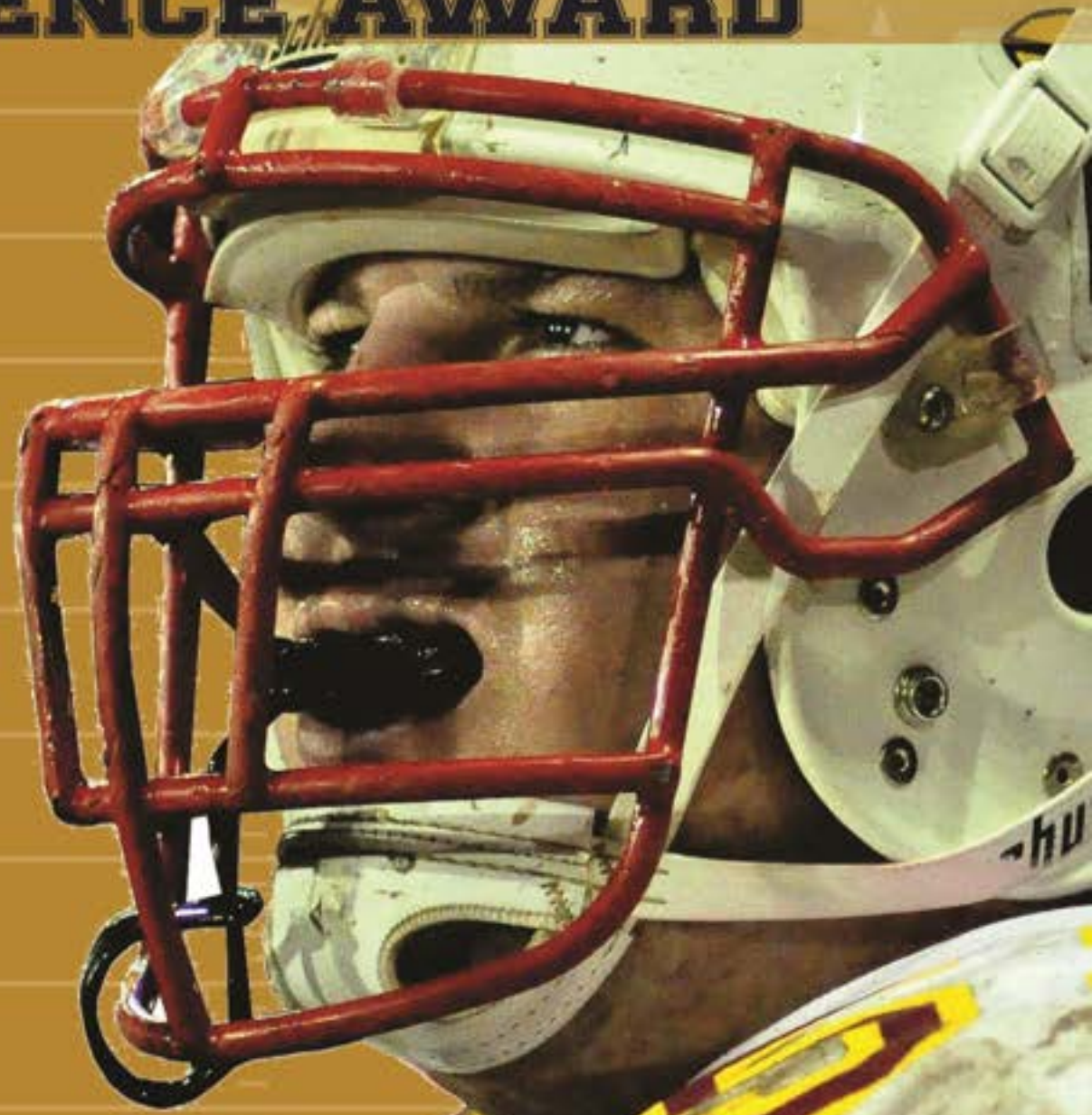
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"WORK HARD
AND ALWAYS
STAY THE
GOOD PATH."



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