

# CHICAGO BEARS ANNOUNCE HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL COACH OF THE WEEK AND ALL-STAR AWARD WINNERS - WEEK 6

For only the second time in the 28-year history of the weekly award, the Chicago Bears have announced that two deserving individuals from the same high school will receive the Chicago Bears High School Coach of the Week and High School All-Star awards for Week 6. They are Coach Lou Sponsel and quarterback Johnny O'Brien, both from William Fremd High School in Palatine.

The Coach of the Week and High School All-Star awards, brought to you by Athletico Physical Therapy, recognize outstanding performances and leadership among high school coaches and players in Illinois. As part of the award programs, the Chicago Bears will make a \$2,000 donation to the Fremd football program and a \$500 donation to the youth football program of O'Brien's choice.

## **Lou Sponsel**

This past Friday night, Oct. 4, Head Coach Lou Sponsel led the Fremd Vikings to a historic 56-35 upset victory over the previously unbeaten Barrington Broncos, ranked second overall in IHSA Class 8A. After two difficult seasons with a 1-8 record, Sponsel has revitalized the program, guiding them to their first playoff appearance since 2019. Under Sponsel's leadership, Fremd is averaging 44 points per game while allowing only 13, demonstrating the effectiveness of his coaching strategies on both sides of the field. A Fremd graduate and former all-state linebacker, Sponsel played on the school's first state playoff team in 1995 under then-coach Mike Donatucci. Sponsel later replaced Donatucci in 2012 as head coach after his 19-year tenure, bringing a deep understanding of Fremd's football tradition. Before his promotion as head coach, Sponsel served as an assistant coach for several years, working with the offensive line, running backs and special teams, while also serving as the team's head strength and conditioning coach. In addition to his high school career, Sponsel played for Northern Illinois University's Huskies, gaining valuable experience at the collegiate level. His time at NIU has provided him with elite insights that he now passes on to his players, preparing them not only for success in high school football but also for the next level. Off the field, Sponsel has revitalized school spirit, leading initiatives like student blackouts at athletic events and creating a strong sense of community around Fremd athletics.



## **Johnny O'Brien**

On Friday, Oct. 4, junior quarterback Johnny O'Brien played an important role in leading the Fremd Vikings to a victory over the Barrington Broncos, while shattering Fremd High School's passing record with 395 yards. O'Brien's standout performance included five touchdown passes, surpassing the previous record of 377 yards set by current Chicago Cubs outfielder Mike Tauchman in 2008. With this win, the Vikings remain undefeated at 6-0, marking their best start since 2009 and securing a top spot in the Mid-Suburban League. This season, O'Brien has thrown for 1,674 yards, accounting for 21 touchdowns while only throwing two interceptions. Verbally committed to Northwestern University, O'Brien is known for his composure, leadership and ability to deliver in high-pressure moments. Off the field, he maintains a 3.9 GPA and is actively involved in community service, including volunteering at youth football camps. The Vikings are set to continue their impressive season as they prepare for a high-stakes matchup against their cross-town rivals, the Palatine Pirates, who are also undefeated in conference and fighting for first place on Friday night, Oct. 11.



## **About Boys High School Coach of the Week & High School All-Star**

The Chicago Bears High School Coach of the Week program was launched in 1996 and the High School All-Star program in 2011. The High School Coach of the Week program honors outstanding Illinois high school coaches who develop players' football skills and knowledge, character, leadership, discipline and teamwork abilities. The nomination criteria for the High School All-Star program includes on-field performance, community involvement and good sportsmanship. Exceptional high school coaches and players who go beyond expectations are nominated by a panel of local high school sports journalists. The winning candidates are chosen each week for the 2024 IHSA football season. Since the program's inception, the Chicago Bears have donated more than \$391,500 to Illinois high schools in support of their football programs. For more information, please visit [ChicagoBears.com/Community/High-School-Football](https://ChicagoBears.com/Community/High-School-Football).

