

For His Birthday, This Quarterback Called the Best Play of All

At 11 years old, **Sawyer Rubinberg** could've asked for just about anything on his birthday—more sports gear, another stack of football cards, maybe a new video game for his Xbox.

Instead, Sawyer called an audible and asked his friends and family for something different: a donation in support of ***GAME ON for Autism***, a flag football fundraiser benefiting **Camp Kehilla**, Sid Jacobson JCC's dedicated summer camp that serves neurodivergent youth across Long Island.

With the help of his parents and an anonymous donor match, Sawyer has raised nearly \$2,000 in an act of compassion not often seen at his age.

"I'm lucky that I have everything [I do,]" Sawyer said simply, when asked why he made the choice. "So that's why I did this."

What makes this decision even more meaningful is how personal it feels to him.

A lifelong football fan and passionate young athlete, Sawyer is the starting quarterback on three different flag football teams in Roslyn. His parents, **Matthew** and **Melanie Rubinberg**, say sports are always on in the house. But when it came time to talk about how to celebrate his birthday, they gently encouraged their son to think differently—and Sawyer, while initially reluctant, listened.

"This wasn't something he immediately jumped at," Melanie shared. "But once he understood it, he really embraced it. He knows he's fortunate, and this was a chance to do something bigger than himself."

That "something bigger" supports a cause close to Sawyer's inner circle.

GAME ON for Autism was founded by the Wasserman family—who are close family friends. **Jocelyn Wasserman** serves on Sid Jacobson JCC's Board of Directors, and the Rubinbergs and Wassermans share a special bond through Timber Lake Camp, the sleepaway camp both families attend each summer.

"He knows their family, he sees the impact," Matthew said. "For him, this donation wasn't just about football—it was about helping other kids get the same joy from camp that he gets."

"Sawyer's decision to donate to *GAME ON* is truly extraordinary," Jocelyn reflected. "At his age, most kids are focused on what they'll receive, not what they can give. His choice speaks volumes about the kind of person he is growing into—it's rare and inspiring."

Sawyer hasn't just demonstrated his inclusive spirit through a one-time donation. He lives it on the field.

His father, who also serves as his football coach, recalled a moment that defined his son's character. In a league that mixes athletes of all skill levels and abilities, Sawyer made a deliberate choice to throw the ball to a teammate with autism—leading to a long gain and, ultimately, the biggest smile of the season.

"That's just who he is," Matthew added. "He's the kind of kid who could target the star players every play, but instead, he looks out for everyone. He spreads the ball around and makes everyone feel like they're a part of the team."

At his elementary school, Sawyer was nominated to join the Hope Squad, a peer-nominated leadership group that focuses on inclusivity and anti-bullying. His teachers, his friends, even adults who coach or interact with him all agree: Sawyer is the kind of teammate—and person—others look up to.

“I’ve watched Sawyer develop into one of the league’s most dynamic players,” said **Keith Lansdberg**, Commissioner of the Roslyn Flag Football League. “Over the past few seasons, he’s not only continued to impress with his skill and competitiveness but has also grown into a more supportive and team-focused player. His progress on and off the field has been great to see.”

While Sawyer’s donation to *GAME ON* will help fund a new adaptive sensory adventure course at Camp Kehilla, his actions go beyond dollars.

“He might not totally understand how big of a deal this is,” Melanie admitted. “But one day, we hope he’ll look back and realize just how much his choice meant—to us, to his community, and to the kids who will benefit from it.”

Sawyer already has his sights set on doing more. “For my Bar Mitzvah,” he said, “I want to keep helping. Maybe even more.”

For now, his message to other kids is simple: “It feels good just to give back.”

GAME ON for Autism returns Sunday, June 1, 2-5pm, at The Park at East Hills, featuring a live DJ, pizza, an ice cream truck, and a high-energy inclusive halftime dance party led by Kerboom Kidz.