



## POP WARNER LITTLE SCHOLARS, INC.

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## New England Patriots' Vice Chairman and President Jonathan Kraft Receives Top Honor At Pop Warner's 46<sup>th</sup> Annual All-American Scholar Banquet

- *New England Patriots Named 2006 Pop Warner NFL Team of the Year*
- *Orlando Predators Named 2006 Pop Warner AFL Team of the Year*
- *Cleveland Browns All-Pro Center LeCharles Bentley Snaps Up the Pop Warner Inspiration To Youth Award*
- *Former Green Bay Packer WR Antonio Freeman Grabs the Pop Warner Humanitarian Award*
- *Emmy Winning ESPN "Outside The Lines" Correspondent, Kelly Naqi Awarded the Pop Warner Female Achievement Award*

**Saturday, May 27, 2006 (Orlando, FL)** – Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc. (PWLS) the largest national youth football and cheerleading organization in the United States bestowed its most prestigious award on **New England Patriots Vice Chairman and President Jonathan Kraft** when he was named the **2006 Warner Award** recipient at Pop Warner's 46<sup>th</sup> Annual All-American Scholar Banquet in Orlando on Saturday night. The Warner Award named after Glenn S. "Pop" Warner is presented to an individual who has achieved excellence in athletics, scholarship and life's endeavors with the highest integrity and humanity. Jonathan was joined by his father **Robert Kraft, Chairman and CEO of the New England Patriots** who accepted the **2006 Pop Warner NFL Team of the Year Award** on behalf of the **New England Patriots**.

Jonathan Kraft has been instrumental in building the New England Patriots into one of the NFL's most innovative and successful franchises that saw the New England Patriots crowned Super Bowl Champions in 2001, 2003 and 2004. In 1994, Jonathan Kraft helped finalize the deal and secure the financing that was needed for the Kraft family to purchase the team. Kraft also developed the financing strategy that enabled the family to privately-finance the entire \$325 million construction of Gillette Stadium keeping the New England Patriots in its Foxboro, MA home. As Vice Chairman of the Patriots, Kraft also is actively involved in league matters, sitting on two NFL owner committees. He most recently played a major role in the negotiation of the new CBA agreement between the NFL owners and NFL Players Association.

For the past two seasons, Jonathan Kraft has coached his son's Pop Warner team. In June of 2005, Kraft took off his Patriots hat to be a concerned parent and voiced his opposition to a number of suburban programs outside of Boston that were planning to disband from Pop Warner by highlighting the benefits of Pop Warner, its concern for creating a safe playing environment and commitment to academics. Jonathan Kraft joins an esteemed group of prominent business and NFL executives to receive The Warner Award including San Diego Chargers President and CEO, Dean Spanos (2005); former U.S. Congressman and Buffalo Bills quarterback, Jack Kemp (2004); Jacksonville Jaguars Owner, Wayne Weaver (2001); Kansas City Chiefs Owner, Lamar Hunt (2000); and NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue (1993).

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“I am honored to receive this award and to participate in an event that recognizes youth for their success in the classroom and beyond the field of play. As someone who spends time coaching Pop Warner kids, I see the confidence that is instilled in Pop Warner participants not just for what they do on the field but in their commitment to perform in the classroom,” said Jonathan Kraft, Vice Chairman and President, New England Patriots.

In addition to Kraft receiving Pop Warner’s top award, the **New England Patriots** also took home the top NFL honor as they were named the **2006 Pop Warner NFL Team of the Year**. In previous year’s Pop Warner awarded NFL Team of the Year to an AFC and NFC team, under the new format only one NFL team will receive the award annually. The Pop Warner NFL Team of the Year Award is presented annually to a club in the National Football League that has demonstrated commitment and support to Pop Warner Little Scholars programs in the local NFL market. New England Patriots Owner, Chairman and CEO, Robert Kraft accepted the award on the team’s behalf.

The New England Patriots are being recognized for their commitment to youth football in New England as a result of the various programs and clinics they offer to help educate them on the fundamentals of the game. Programs include Punt, Pass and Kick, Patriots Coaching Academy, and providing Pop Warner programs with the opportunity to practice like the pros at Gillette Stadium, the Patriots have demonstrated their commitment by providing support and encouragement to football players of all ages. In 2005, the Patriots welcomed almost 10,000 youth football players to participate in training camp activities, attend Patriots games and hold practices and scrimmages in the team’s practice facility.

“Being recognized as the Pop Warner NFL Team of the Year out of 32 NFL teams who all share a tremendous commitment to youth football is truly an honor. This award is one that is a tribute to everyone in our organization for their hard work and their efforts to support youth football throughout New England,” said Robert Kraft, Chairman and CEO, New England Patriots. “Sports teaches valuable life lessons to youth like perseverance, endurance and mental toughness, Pop Warner takes it a step above by going beyond the playing field and reinforcing the importance of academics among today’s young athletes. Pop Warner’s All-American Scholars are a testament to that,” added Kraft.

#### **Other Awardees:**

The All-American Scholar Banquet awarded for the first time the **2006 Pop Warner AFL Team of the Year** to the Arena Football League’s **Orlando Predators**. The Predators worked with Central Florida Pop Warner programs in 2005 and brought players and coaches to the Pop Warner Super Bowl and National Championship Week to participate in a variety of events, including pre-game pep talks in Disney World, as well as provided game tickets to a variety of Pop Warner programs in Central Florida during the 2006 AFL season. The AFL Team of the Year Award will be distributed annually to a club in the Arena Football League that demonstrates commitment and support to Pop Warner Little Scholar programs in the local AFL market.

Newly acquired **Cleveland Browns Center LeCharles Bentley**, an All-Pro player for the New Orleans Saints in 2003 and 2005, was awarded the Glenn S. **Pop Warner Inspiration to Youth Award** for his community work which inspires the youth of today to become great achievers of tomorrow. LeCharles was also honored for his ability to be an All-Pro player at both Center and Right Guard, his commitment to play at any position to better serve the team and his ability to overcome challenging circumstances as a result of Hurricane Katrina and maintain his focus and play at an All-Pro level. Bentley is the latest in a list of NFL greats to receive the Inspiration to Youth Award including, Arizona Cardinals QB, Kurt Warner (2005); Oakland Raiders WR, Tim Brown (2004); Kansas City Chiefs RB, Priest Holmes (2002) and OLB Derrick Thomas (1997); Dallas Cowboys RB, Emmitt Smith (1996) and former San Diego Chargers LB, Junior Seau in 1994.

**Former Green Bay Packer WR, Antonio Freeman** was awarded the **Pop Warner Humanitarian Award**. The Pop Warner Humanitarian Award is an award that was presented for the first time in 2005 (Arizona Cardinals WR, Larry Fitzgerald) and is given to an individual who has portrayed both outstanding athletic achievement and high humanitarian principles while serving as an inspiration to the youth of today. Antonio was honored for his constant work for charities including his work on behalf of Big Brothers Big Sisters, the March of Dimes and “Coats for Kids.”

**Emmy Award Winning, ESPN “Outside The Lines” Correspondent, Kelly Naqi** was awarded **Pop Warner’s Female Achievement Award**, which is presented to a woman who inspires others by showing remarkable strength of character and leadership through her lifetime achievements. Naqi began her career at ESPN in 1987 as an associate producer, before being promoted to New York Bureau producer in 1995 and eventually moving over to the other side of the camera as an “on-air correspondent” in 1999. Naqi is one of two full-time reporters assigned to the Emmy Award winning series *Outside The Lines* and also contributes to ESPNEWS, *SportsCenter*, *NFL Tonight*, and *Baseball Tonight*. Naqi is recognized for covering socially relevant topics and how they impact sports. Naqi joins a long list of other inspirational females that have won the Pop Warner Female Achievement Award including, CBS NFL Sideline Reporter, Lesley Visser (2005); Sports Illustrated’s Cleary Simpson (2002); ESPN Reporter, Robin Roberts (2001); American Idol Judge and Singer, Paula Abdul (2000); and 1996 Olympic Gymnastics Gold Medalist, Kerri Strug (1999).

Pop Warner is the only youth sports organization that requires academic guidelines for its members to participate in Pop Warner programs. Each year Pop Warner recognizes those participants that have achieved the highest academic merit with the All-American Scholar Banquet. Students who have a 96% or better grade point average are eligible to apply for this prestigious recognition, however, the standard for excellence increases each year with the continued growth of the program. While the student’s grades are an integral part, applicants are also graded on their various school-oriented and community activities and achievements from the past year.

This year’s All-American Scholars comprise the top one percent of all Pop Warner participants nationwide, and the average grade point average was an incredible 98.1 percent. Over 6,000 scholar-athletes were named to the First Team, Second Team or Honorable Mention All-American Scholars, based on a score calculated from the student’s grade point average and addendum activities.

First Team All-American Scholar is the highest achievement a Pop Warner student-athlete can achieve, with only 35 football participants and 25 cheerleaders and dancers selected per grade level. First Team All-American Scholar’s in eighth grade and higher are also eligible for one of many scholarships that are awarded at the National Scholar Banquet.

**About Pop Warner Little Scholars:**

*Founded in 1929 and headquartered in Langhorne, PA. Pop Warner Little Scholars is the largest national youth football and cheerleading organization in the United States and the only youth sports organization that emphasizes academics as an equivalent to athletics. Currently there are over 400,000 children in Pop Warner organizations in 43 states, Guam, Scotland, Germany, Russia, Japan and Mexico.*

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