

# LETTERMAN JACKETS: A dying trend?

**THE POPULARITY OF VARSITY JACKETS IS QUESTIONABLE HERE AT MALVERN. STUDENTS AND FACULTY SHARE THEIR OPINIONS ON THE ISSUE.**

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**L**etterman jackets have been a tradition in high schools around the country. They show school spirit, and pride for the team the player is on. Here at Malvern Prep, varsity jackets are a normality, and seeing an athlete wearing them isn't a very big deal.

This year, the school pride for the football team is very high, as the team won its first Inter-Ac title in three years, and rallied as a team after former Head Coach Aaron Brady's departure. Football players are proud to wear their jackets around campus. But how does one earn a varsity jacket?

Athletic Director Mr. Kurt Ruch said that anyone on the team, at any level, can order a varsity jacket. A player does not have to be on the varsity team to get it, but he must at least play the sport for Malvern.

"We normally do it for a varsity team. It is totally up to them and their parents if they decide to order one or not, so it's not mandatory," Ruch said.

A varsity letter can be sewn on if the student is a varsity player.

"Mrs. Gustitis, Director of Retail Operations, will take an order, and I think it's a minimum of six that they have to order at a time. She does that all throughout the year. Different sports, different times," Ruch said.

Gustitis said that the only two teams at Malvern that have varsity letterman jackets are wrestling and football.

"The kids get their names, their numbers, the words on the back, number on the sleeve, and either Malvern Prep Wrestling or Malvern Prep Football," she said.

Other sports at Malvern don't wear varsity jackets, even though they have the option to. "I don't think a baseball player would want a heavy jacket to wear," Ruch said. "Instead, I think they'd rather wear a pullover."

Gustitis says that the trend in the purchasing of the jackets has been relatively the same through her years at Malvern, and that the jackets have not changed much either.

"It's not a huge amount of kids who buy them every year," she said. "If you buy it in your freshman year, then you have it for four years and there's no need to buy another one."

The tradition of varsity jackets dates back all the way to 1865 at Harvard University. According

to *GQ*, the "jacket" wasn't a jacket at all at first. It used to be a sweater. Harvard's baseball team sewed a giant "H" onto the middle of the sweater, thus creating the first ever varsity sweater. It wasn't until ten years later that the football team followed suit.

The actual varsity jacket that we wear today was introduced in the 1930s. To earn this jacket, a player would have to prove himself on the field. If a player made an impact on the team, they would earn their jacket. If they barely contributed to the team, they would not receive one.

It depends on the school to decide what the requirements are to receive the letter. At Malvern, the rule for football is that only players who contribute to the varsity team get a varsity letter, but anyone on the team can get a varsity jacket.

Ruch thinks that the popularity of the jackets has grown over the years he's been at Malvern.

"I've been here since 1997," he said. "And I would say definitely my first couple years, I didn't see them at all. And then they slowly started making a comeback in the early 2000s, and it seems that there are more and more kids interested in wearing them again."

Ruch also thinks that championship jackets are being worn a lot more as well. "Championship jackets are often lighter than varsity jackets, so I see more students wearing championship jackets, but I don't think that takes away from the popularity of varsity jackets," he said.

Assistant Dean of Students and Theology teacher Dr. Henry Poce believes that varsity jackets are worn right when they get them. "They usually wear them when they first get them at a banquet or when they order them, so I do see students wearing them," Poce said. "It's often a sign of pride that they participate on the team."

Poce played varsity football when he was in high school, and he sometimes wore his varsity jacket. "We were given letters for being on a varsity team that we could sew onto the sweaters or jackets," he said. "It was just a sign of pride that you played football. It was something that you worked hard for."

However, Poce does not think that varsity jackets are necessary for teams. "If a team chooses not to get them, that's their option," he said. "I think it's just a way for spirit. It's a way to identify that you belong to a club, a group, or a team. It's the spirit that we have among us."

English teacher Mrs. Nicole Wilkinson said she sees varsity football players wearing their jackets around campus.

"Usually in the winter it's very cold, and the players seem like they are nice and warm," she said.

Wilkinson played varsity tennis for Archbishop Prendergast in Drexel Hill, PA. "We did not get varsity jackets for these sports, but we did get varsity letters," Wilkinson said.

Even though she did not have a varsity jacket of her own, that did not stop her from wearing someone else's in high school. "My dad played football at Syracuse in college," Wilkinson said. "I used to wear his varsity sweater to school."

Wilkinson said that she was not the only person to wear someone else's varsity jacket. "It was more of a guy thing, but if you were going steady with a guy, he would give you

his varsity jacket," she said. "And that was the biggest thing ever. Girlfriends would often wear their boyfriend's varsity jacket."

Wilkinson is uncertain about the current popularity of varsity jackets. "I would like to see more varsity sports have a varsity jacket," she said. "I think it's important because you've earned that letter or jacket and it's really cool to be able to show it off and be proud of it."

She also thinks the jackets are fashionable. "They have this really retro factor to them, and I think that's really cool," she said.

Wilkinson does not feel that varsity jackets are necessary, but she definitely thinks they provide school pride. "I think that most of our student athletes are really proud of their accomplishments on the field or the court or wherever. And I think that's one way to publicly celebrate that," she said.

"So wherever you go, that's a mark of one achievement or something that you're really proud of."

Senior Sean Grady said he wears his jacket in the winter time. "The jacket is very heavy. It's a very warm and comfy jacket. I'll occasionally wear it to school," he said.

Unlike Ruch, Grady thinks that the popularity of varsity jackets has diminished over the four years he's been at Malvern. "I think that students would rather wear championship jackets rather than varsity jackets because championship jackets are lighter and an Inter-Ac championship is some-

thing to be very proud of," he said.

Grady also thinks that the jackets can be a badge of pride for athletes. "Varsity jackets are not necessary, but they are cool because they tell people that you play a varsity sport," Grady said.

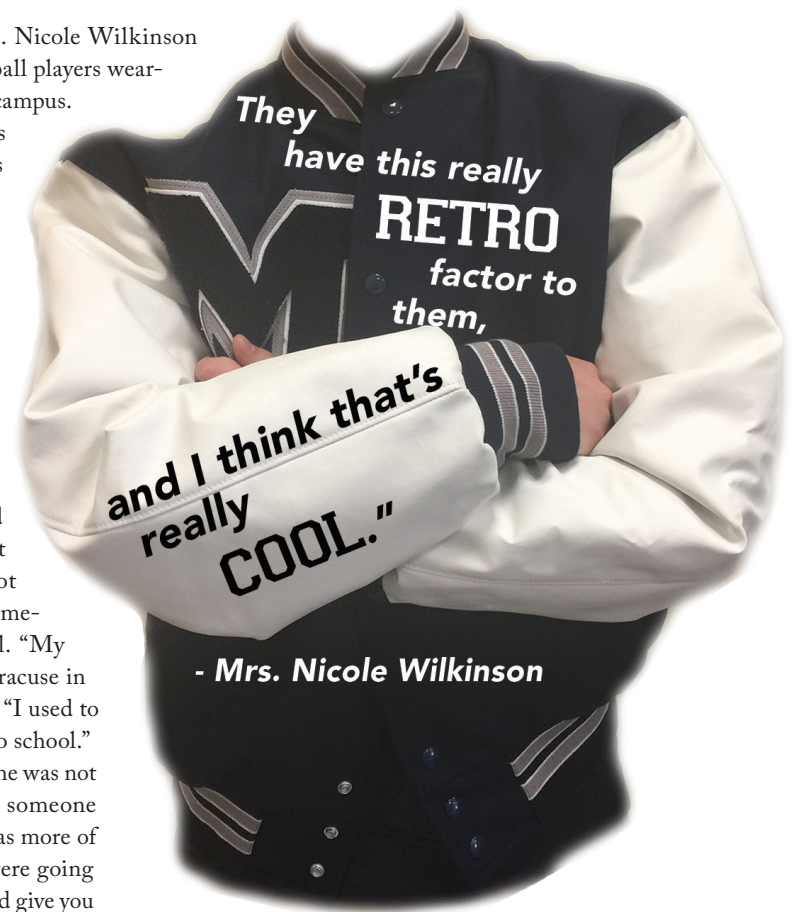
Senior Daniel Sullivan wore his jacket when he got it in his sophomore year, but hasn't worn it as much lately. "I haven't really worn it to school because I think of it as a little bit of showing off," he said.

Sullivan said he now has his jacket at home when it is cold or shoveling his walkway.

Will all varsity jackets eventually be worn only for winter chores, or replaced by lightweight championship jackets? Only time will tell, but with nearly 150 years of history behind the fashion, it seems likely that the tradition will continue as long as players merit the recognition. ♦

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**ONLY TWO FRIAR SPORTS CURRENTLY GET VARSITY JACKETS: WRESTLING & FOOTBALL.**



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