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O-A to give football jersey to family of 2005 grad killed in Iraq

By [George Basler](#)
Press & Sun-Bulletin

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OWEGO -- The Owego-Apalachin Central School District community will remember "a special kid" before today's football game against Whitney Point.

In a ceremony prior to the 1:30 p.m. kickoff, the district will present the football jersey worn by U.S. Army Specialist Fourth Class Charles E. Bilbrey Jr., 21, to his family, Athletic Director Joseph Palladino said.

Bilbrey, a 2005 Owego Free Academy graduate, was killed in Iraq in July when an improvised explosive device hit his vehicle in Diyala province. He was a member of 3rd Infantry Division, based at Fort Stewart, Ga.

"He was a special kid," Palladino said. Bilbrey played offensive and defensive lineman and wore number 86. "He worked hard in everything he did," Palladino said.

The idea for the presentation came from varsity football coach Steve Virkler, the athletic director said. The family will receive the jersey Bilbrey wore in his senior year. "It's a way to recognize him for his service and dedication to the country," Palladino said.

At Owego Free Academy, Bilbrey was involved in sports, clubs and student government. "We're touched, to say the least," Bilbrey's father, Charles Bilbrey Sr., said about today's ceremony.

The family was at Fort Stewart recently when a tree was planted on "Warriors' Walk" in Bilbrey's memory. The unit is planting a tree for every 3rd Infantry Division soldier who dies in Iraq.

The presentation of his son's old football jersey is meaningful as well, Bilbrey said. "We're honored that the school would do something like this," he said.

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To the Bilbrey family ... I wish there were words to comfort you in your loss. Please know that others care about you and appreciate the fine son and soldier you raised in our area.

Posted by: **stevie** on Sat Sep 29, 2007 9:27 am

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