



RED BANK CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL'S ARMANDO MELENDEZ SELECTED TO AMERICAN FOOTBALL WORLDWIDE ELITE TEAM; WILL REPRESENT USA IN MATCHUP AGAINST ITALIAN NATIONAL TEAM

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MOLINE, III. – Armando Melendez, a standout athlete at Red Bank Catholic High School in Red Bank, New Jersey, has been chosen to represent the United States as part of the American Football Worldwide *ELITE TEAM*. Melendez, a 5' 10", 180 pound cornerback/wide receiver/kick returner, will be one of 30 players on the high school senior select team squad.

The American Football Worldwide *ELITE TEAM* will travel to Italy for a week of educational touring, serving as ambassadors for American football and culminating the week participating in a rare and special international game against a national 20U American Football team representing Italy. The game will take place at Vigorelli Stadium, in Milan, on Saturday April 8, 2023.

American Football Worldwide's *ELITE TEAM* builds its roster from scouting, recommendations and nominations provided by high school coaches. The roster has representation from every region of the United States and this year will have student-athletes from 13 different states and the District of Columbia.

Team members and staff will all gather for the first time in Rome on Sunday, April 2nd. During the week, the team will practice daily, typically in the early morning, with the remainder of the day invested in educational touring of many of the historical and cultural highlights of Italy. Dozens of parents and family members will also join the tour party for a highly memorable experience in one of the world's most historically fascinating countries.

The team and tour party will travel from Rome in central Italy to the tip of Lake Como just north of Milan. During the week the players will tour many of the historical icons of Italy including the Roman Coliseum and Forum, the piazzas of Rome, Vatican City and St. Peter's Basilica, Sienna, Florence, Cinque Terra, Lake Como, and Milan.

Looking forward to the tour, AFW President Jim Barnes commented, "Observing these young men grow from the education that international travel uniquely provides will once again be the most rewarding aspect of the tour. Each day will hold special life-expanding experiences for these young men all of whom demonstrate that they possess a grander vision for their future. In so many respects, this is a tremendous experience for a student to have before going on to the collegiate level."

Melendez was a part of two incredibly successful seasons for the Caseys of head coach Michael Lange. Red Bank Catholic won the 2021 New Jersey state championship and finished second in 2022 with a 10-2 overall record. Melendez was named the team's most improved offensive player in 2021 and was selected for the NUC All-Star game in Savannah and the 2023 College Football Now All Star game in Florida.

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He was awarded the Pete Apollo Scholarship, which is given annually to a Red Bank Catholic football player in honor of Peter Apollo, who was killed on 9/11.

Melendez is a member of the National Honor Society and received an excellence in academic achievement award from the College Board National Hispanic Recognition Program. He won academic excellence awards all four years at Red Bank Catholic and was also honored for his excellence in geometry.

"I joined this team for an unforgettable experience and the ability to play one last high school football game," said Melendez about his selection to the AFW ELITE team.

Intermixed with the immense educational value of the trip, these student-athletes will improve as football players. The team will look to come together in one week's time learning new terminology and football schemes as well as putting together a formidable game plan for their Italian hosts.

"Meeting one another for the first time and installing a well-coordinated game plan in all phases of football in less than a week will be a significant challenge," said AFW Head Coach Jim Barnes. "However, from the scouting and research we have done our staff believes there is excellent talent on this roster, and we are very excited about the potential for this team. To culminate their week playing a game of American football at the international level representing the USA will be an unforgettable thrill."

This game will be the 10th contest between *AFW ELITE* and American football teams in Europe. In March of 2013 and 2014 *AFW ELITE* traveled to France for a similar educational and cultural tour defeating the French national 19U team on two occasions. From 2015 through 2019, *AFW ELITE TEAM* accepted invitations from the Italian Federation of American Football earning victories each year over their Italian national 19U team. In 2017 and 2018 American Football Worldwide also fielded two teams, including a second *ELITE TEAM* that toured Ireland and competed with the Irish National 20U team. Those games were historical in that they were the first and only contests by 20U Irish players against competition from outside of Ireland. Set to return with teams to Italy and Spain in 2020, *AFW ELITE TEAM* was sidelined by the pandemic. AFW is thrilled to return student-athletes once again to Europe for a tremendously positive growth experience.

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