

Juvenile Justice Youth get Face(mask)-Time with Role Models, Mentors

by Matt Jenkins, Communications Officer

Having a person to look up to, aspire to follow [in their footsteps] or emulate just a bit to gain confidence helps people make it through life's endeavors. That's what it means to have a role model or mentor. On Monday, July 23, 25 male students from Stonewall Jackson Youth Development

Center had the opportunity to share some time on the field with a couple of big role models, who just might be faster than a speeding locomotive or possess the ability to topple tall buildings in a single bound. At least it may seem like they possess those superhuman skills when watching them take the field on Sunday afternoons every fall.

Through its community outreach program, the [NFL franchise] Carolina Panthers staff began arriving at Frank Liske Park in Cabarrus County to set-up and host this very special football skills clinic. Excitement grew as starting defensive end, Mario Addison, and starting defensive tackle, Kawann

Short, stepped off the bus and jogged onto the freshly cut turf to introduce themselves to the kids. Both players shared their own stories of growing up and facing tough decisions, before gathering the group into a huddle to amp up the energy prior to the players [and other staff] running the youth through a series of skill position stations. The

morning contained smiles, laughter, athletic displays and most importantly, plenty of opportunities to engage with strong character role models for these young men.

After sharing lunch together back at the Stonewall Jackson facility, the group continued interacting together, as players offered more serious discussion about making good decisions and staying on a good path through life. "We all grew up in similar places [as you], but we didn't let that determine our future, we didn't let that determine where we wanted to go in life," Short told the students. "You might have to go through some rough to get what you want."

The fame and visibility that comes from the world of professional football, means these players often seem larger-than-life. It is that lofted status that provided the conduit for meaningful mentoring to these young men. While the players who spent time with the students are certainly blessed with talent on the field, each expressed a strong pull to give something back to the community, and displayed a proven ability to connect with youth from all walks of life. Addison summed up the day quite simply, "My main thing is, showing that somebody cares ... put a smile on their face, man."

Stonewall Jackson YDC Director Peter Brown worked with [Panthers] Community Relations Director Riley Fields and Communications Director Steve Drummond to make this event happen for these youth. He was inspired by the day's activities, telling the players, "You don't have to say anything profound, just your presence today is a remarkable gift." Reflecting on the day's activities with several NCDPS staff members, Brown went on to say, "Today was filled with uplifting messages of encouragement and illustrates that through hard work and perseverance, anything is possible, anything can be."

It was apparent by day's end, that everyone from both organizations [NCDPS and Carolina Panthers] was moved by the meaningful engagement which occurred. Pre-season workouts for the [NFL] team began Tuesday, July 24 at Wofford College, so taking time from their busy pre-season training and conditioning schedule created a special opportunity and some lasting memories. These role models provided just the right mix of fellowship and understanding to potentially make an even bigger impact on these young lives.

Click [here](#) for a closer look into some of the Panthers outreach both in Carolina and their hometowns across America.

