

Williams camp teaches more than football

James Johnson
Staff writer

(June 24, 2005) — Quentin Brooks wanted to learn more about the game of football when he applied for a position in the Free Football and Life Skills Camp two years ago.

Brooks never played for an organized team before, but planned to try out for one of the teams at Marshall High. The instruction Brooks received helped his cause.

"What happened was I left (learning) a whole lot about things like how to plan your goals, values and self-worth," Brooks said. "I think more about the future, rather than the moment. "A lot of people think the camp is just football, but they take a good portion of it to show you other things. We do assignments. We have homework."

Instruction goes beyond how to throw and catch a football or throw a block. Basic financial literacy, importance of education and health are some of the other topics discussed.

Brooks, a senior to be at Marshall, will go camping for the third consecutive year. He is one of about 200 high school-aged students from around the Greater Rochester region selected to participate in the Free Football and Life Skills Camp at University of Rochester.

Camp applicants must provide an explanation of why they want to attend, and pay no fees or expenses if chosen.

This is the sixth year of the camp's existence in Rochester and is part of a larger weekend of events presented by the Youth Lifeline Foundation.

National Football League tight end Roland Williams, a Rochester native and East High graduate, created the foundation six years ago and has provided large portions of the camp expenses from his own pocket.

The foundation's plan for expansion has continued, as the cities of Oakland, Calif., Las Vegas and Utica in Oneida County also have or will host camps.

"Honestly, we're trying to meet the supply and demand for this," Williams, a Syracuse University graduate, said. "My relationship with God won't allow me to (just kick back).

"'To whom much is given, much will be required.' I've been given a lot."

Williams said that he wants to "spread the word" about the foundation, including here in Rochester. Counting the city itself, 38 businesses or individuals with ties to the area are sponsoring this year's events here.

"The time is now for the average person to step up and give," Williams said. "Obviously, we'd like to expand the number of youth we impact.

"The rest of the community needs to step up in any way possible to keep all of this growing."

Local professionals and National Football League players, such as Kurt Warner, Ed Hartwell and Charles Woodson, have been instructors at past camps. They do a bit of listening, in addition to sharing their knowledge and life experiences.

Tom FitzGerald, vice-president of strategic markets at PAETEC Communications, grew up in Roxbury, a tough section of Boston. He is a coach and talk facilitator at the Free Football and Life Skills Camp.

"You see a lot of potential," FitzGerald said. "You see a lot of energy, kids looking for help. It reminds me of Boston 25 years ago.

"Here I am today, but I didn't start off any differently. It's not going to pay off tomorrow, but if you keep working, it will in the long run."

Brooks said he earned his first computer through the Youth Lifeline Foundation after he raised his grades at Marshall. He hopes to transfer to East High for his senior year in order to earn more Advanced Placement credits toward a college degree.

"I'm more focused now," Brooks, who hopes to become an entrepreneur, said about the camp's impact. "I used to get suspended a lot my ninth-grade year. After I met (people at the camp), I don't know how to explain it, but they helped me.

"In the long run, I'll want to give back to the foundation and the community, the same thing that Roland has done."

JAMESJ@DemocratandChronicle.com