

SPORTS

Booker Alumni Come Home Tonight as Gladiators

Former Booker standouts Chauncey Jones and Darian Platt will return to Tornado Alley on Saturday night as members of the Florida Football Alliance's Bradenton Gladiators.

By **Chad Brockhoff** February 5, 2011

The game of football molded them and created paths for Chauncey Jones and Darian Platt.

Those respective paths will include a stop at [Booker High School's Tornado Alley](http://sarasota.patch.com/listings/booker-high-school) (<http://sarasota.patch.com/listings/booker-high-school>) at 7pm Saturday when the undefeated Bradenton Gladiators (2-0) face the winless Sarasota Millionaires (0-2) in a Florida Football Alliance game. The contest represents a homecoming for the second cousins, who starred at Booker under former head coach Leroy Ryals and Fred Gilmore, respectively.

"It doesn't matter which sideline," Jones said. "We're purple and gold (Booker's colors)."

Just as he does for the Gladiators, Jones played running back for the Tornadoes and rushed for 3,335 yards over his final two seasons of high school football. Several then-NCAA Division I-A schools courted Jones as a high school senior in February 2001, but he did not announce his college choice until the next year.

Jones played collegiately at the NAIA Division II level for the Jacksonville-based Edward Waters College before becoming a two-time Southern State Football League All-Star with the now-defunct Venice Vikings.

A member of the Millionaires during their inaugural season in 2007, Jones left the team the next year to pursue an opportunity to play professional indoor football.

This season marks Jones' fourth with the Millionaires' fiercest rival. Jones has accounted for a touchdown in each of the Gladiators' first two games and has rushed for 120 yards on 31 carries this season.

In last year's 42-6 victory over the Millionaires, Jones scored two touchdowns and rushed for 130 yards.

"Football is football anywhere you go," Jones said. "Sometimes, you just feel more wanted and more appreciated by certain organizations. I'm friends with some of (the Millionaires). There are some of them that don't like me, but that's football."

Football is more than just football for Jones. It allows him to set an example for his sons, 7-year-old Chauncey Jr. and 3-year-old Malik.

"What I do is for my kids, so I can make a better life for my kids and be a role model for my kids and other kids," said Jones, who recently received an offer to play professionally in Poland at the end of the Gladiators' season. "I keep a positive mind frame. I always tried to stay out of trouble because my mother taught me that trouble is easy to get into, but hard to get out of. I need to be a positive role model for my kids."

While Jones attempted to avoid trouble and the bad crowd, his younger cousin found himself right in the middle of juvenile detention cell before entering high school. Platt realized after several conversations with facility worker and Booker assistant Sherman Rackley that he had to change and commit himself to something positive.

Fishing and football became Platt's refuges.

Platt played on an undefeated freshman team at Booker in the fall of 2002. He overcame a motorcycle accident in January 2004 that led to the placement of four screws in his leg to become the team's leading tackler during his last two seasons as a Tornado.

An undersized middle linebacker, Platt earned Defensive Player of the Year honors from the Sarasota Herald-Tribune in the fall of 2005 and helped the Tornadoes to an appearance in the Class 3A state championship game. While teammates and classmates, including current Green Bay Packer Sam Shields III, were set to sign national letters of intents with colleges and universities, Platt knew he had to with academic issues before graduating.

After sitting in limbo, Platt became a freshman All-Minnesota College Athletic Conference strong safety at Mesabi Range Community and Technical College a little less than four years after playing his final game at Booker. He continues to work on his associate of arts degree while playing for the Gladiators and preparing for a NFL tryout camp later this month.

From the weak side linebacker position, Platt is the Gladiators' leading tackler with 21 total tackles.

"I'm just trying to maintain and see if I can fulfill that dream," Platt said. "Whether it's the NFL or the Canadian league, I still haven't given up on that dream."



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