

Gladiator News

Bradenton Gladiators Volume 1, Issue 2

Posted by the Bradenton Herald Fri, July 24, 2009

Gladiators more than football

Bradenton Gladiators do great work away from the field

By JOHN LEMBO
jlembo@bradenton.com

The Bradenton Gladiators are not just about football.

They are an organization steeped in second chances, offering folks another try at not just football — but at life.

Suit up for the Gladiators, and the commitment doesn't stop with nightly practices and weekend ballgames.

Guys think they're becoming football players. The goal, however, is for them to become better people.

"We want people to pick up good people skills, become role models," said Edrick Sweeting, president of Bradenton Gladiators Football, Inc. "Once you get that, you get the skills that you need for life."

Consider it a positive diversionary tactic — people learning one skill while honing another. And such was the crux of the youth football camp the Gladiators hosted this week at Bayshore High, which was sponsored by Dick's Sporting Goods.

Geared for campers ages 6 and older, the camp dealt with basic fundamentals of football — offense, defense and special teams. Through such drills, however, campers also learned the importance of teamwork, hard work, sportsmanship, work ethic and discipline.

"Through sports, especially for kids, it's important to teach the important things in life," Sweeting said. "We're trying to teach about exercise, learning personal skills."

Of course it wasn't all work.

"We want them to have a little fun," Sweeting said, "and learn to enjoy the game."

The camp is just a portion of the Gladiators' community involvement. They ran an annual back-to-school drive last summer, when the team stuffed 275 backpacks with all sorts of school supplies — pencils, paper, journals, notebooks, crayons — and handed them out to children in Manatee County.

They're doing it again this summer, and Sweeting is hoping to get enough donations to fill 500 school bags.

The Gladiators also offer mentoring programs and even conducted a pep rally at Wakeland Elementary School in anticipation of the FCATS.

The organization also awarded three scholarships, based on academic and community merit, as well as athletic involvement, to county high school students in June, and helped construct the Village Central playground.

So much for the Gladiators being all about football, huh?

"We want to get people back into the working world," Sweeting said, "and we're trying to teach them how to be good role models."