

Indian Country Today

NFL Players Learn on the Rez, Part II

Rodney Harwood 9/26/15



NFL Hall of Famer Randall McDaniel works with athletes at the Pine Ridge Camp

Former Pittsburgh linebacker Marv Kellum, who grew up on a farm in south central Kansas, had a heartwarming experience as a guest football camp coach on the Seneca reservation in upstate New York. He came in not knowing what to expect and left with a lasting impression. “The people I met definitely made a difference in the way I think,” said Kellum. “Whatever I might have taught them, I learned so much more from them than they’ll ever know.”

They shared some laughs. They learned from each other. Kellum gave the Seneca kids a chance to do something not a lot of people get to see when he brought out his rings from Super Bowl IX and X. “I let them see ’em, touch ’em and hold ’em. One of them asked if those

are real diamonds?” he said with a laugh. “There was one kid with a Philadelphia Eagles T-shirt. I told him ‘I’ll trade you my ring for that shirt,’ and he wouldn’t do it.”

They run NFL combine drills on the field. One day they hope the NFL will film a Play 60 commercial on the rez. But until then, Jim Warne, Lakota, will continue to utilize the Medicine Wheel philosophy with emphasis on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual grounding to guide his [Warrior Society](#) youth football camps at reservations around the country. He knows all too well the initials NFL make a bigger impact than the Ph.D. he is currently working on. But whatever it takes to make the connection is fine by him.



Former Steelers linebacker Marv Kellum works with players at the Warrior Society Camp on the Seneca Reservation. (Courtesy Jim Warne)

“Each camp has a classroom setting where we talk about choices and making the right choice,” said Warne, who is the director of the Center for American Indian Rehabilitation at San Diego State University. “I was talking to Randall before we got started and I said, ‘Look around, seven out every 10 kids in this room might not graduate

from high school.’ ”

The stakes are high. Whether it be an urban setting or one of the poorest reservations in the country, **NFL Hall of Famer Randall McDaniel** knows you just keep putting it out there because you never know who is listening.

“I believe in giving something back and it has to be a hands-on approach for me. With the young kids, you have to catch them early so you can plant the seed that they have opportunities available to them,” said McDaniel, who grew up on the poor side of Avondale, Ariz., and wondered if he’d ever leave. “I’ve had kids I didn’t think I reached at all come back after going to college and say, ‘You helped me with this along the way.’ I can’t even put into words how that feels.”

Jesse Trueblood Sr. is a Lakota who grew up on Pine Ridge and coached football at Pine Ridge High School. **His son Jesse Jr. spent his summers at the Warrior Society camp and is now at Chadron State College** in Nebraska on a football scholarship. “I would say that Randall and Jim coming here is a big part of my son’s success. Jesse’s an offensive tackle and got to learn from the best,” said Trueblood, whose son also won a South Dakota state wrestling championship. “The statement they make during the camp is that, ‘You never quit.’ Throughout the day, you’ll hear them yell out that one phrase - never quit. I think it makes a difference to our kids here.” The same message echoed through Seneca Country. **Uriah John has been going to the camp in New York for the past six years. The 15-year-old Seneca’s eyes are wide open to the possibilities** of what can happen if you never quit. He was also one of 80 kids that had a chance to hold a Super Bowl ring in his hand.

“They told us you can get off the rez and get an education, but to remember that you represent your nation and your people to the rest of the world,” said John. “The Thompson brothers (Onondaga) for example, have gone on to play professional lacrosse. **I’m looking to be the first Seneca professional athlete.**”

The elders cooked the meals. The children listened and the **NFL guys**

walked away with a better understanding of Indian people than they ever had before.

“The kids were great, and so respectful,” said Kellum. “We were doing a talk and a couple of kids in the back were fooling around. Afterwards an elder brought them up and said these boys have something to say to you. They were just being kids, really, but they apologized for any disrespect I might have felt. You just don’t see that in other places.”

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<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/09/26/nfl-players-learn-rez-part-ii-161882>

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