

# Sound Mind Sound Body camp should be the largest yet

Matt Dorsey, Special to the Free Press 3:06 p.m. EDT June 5, 2015

*State of Michigan football camp is now 10 years old, and this year's camp will host more than 800 prospects*



(Photo: Kirthmon F. Dozier, DFP)

Curtis Blackwell founded the Sound Mind Sound Body camp more than 10 years ago with a simple idea in mind: To not only expose Detroit kids to what it takes to become a college football player, but also have them learn the long-term value of academics success and character development.

Today, the camp is arguably the biggest football and life-skills camp in the nation, and college coaches from across the nation have taken notice.

Over the past decade, thousands of Detroit-area football prospects have been introduced to what college coaches are looking for in a student-athlete.

While football is a focus of the camp, participants attend seminars on college preparation, drug awareness, teen violence and smart decision-making. Also, current college coaches and players, as well as NFL players, hold open forums with Q&A sessions about what it takes to be successful, on and off the field.

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Blackwell has since accepted a position at Michigan State as Director of College Advancement and Performance, but Sound Mind Sound Body continues its mission. Today, former U-M football player and current camp director Deon Johnson handles much of the day-to-day activities of the camp, and 2015 should be the biggest year yet.

More than 800 players will attend. Though the camp has gone national, the lion's share of players are still from the state of Michigan with a focus on Detroit. Current Spartans such as Lawrence Thomas, Malik McDowell and Ed Davis all went through the program.

This year, the athletes will learn what it takes to be successful from some of the biggest names in college football. MSU's Mark Dantonio, Ohio State's Urban Meyer, U-M's Jim Harbaugh, Penn State's James Franklin and Wisconsin's Paul Chryst are a few of the Big Ten coaches who will attend. Even Pac-12 teams Stanford, USC, UCLA and Oregon will have coaches in in Detroit.

A new speaker at this year's camp should get some prospects' attention: Detroit Lions coach Jim Caldwell. Caldwell, who has spent a good portion of his 37 years coaching in college, knows the value of the Sound Mind Sound Body message.

The legacy of this camp is difficult to measure, though hundreds of participants went on to receive scholarships. It's the participants who applied the off-field message that Blackwell and Johnson are certainly most proud of.

Both know that playing football will only get you so far in life, and it is what people do after their football careers that defines them.



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