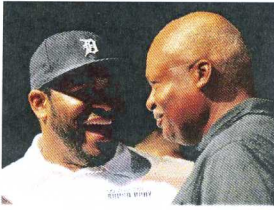


Bettis, Caldwell challenge campers: Don't make excuses



Angelique S. Chengelis, The Detroit News 5:52 p.m. EDT June 11, 2015



(Photo: Daniel Mears, Detroit News)

Macomb – The messages from Detroit Lions coach Jim Caldwell and NFL Hall of Famer Jerome Bettis to the estimated 1,500 participants in the Sound Mind Sound Body Academy involved the importance of education and the understanding that football is a path and not an end point.

Caldwell and Bettis were the key speakers during the opening of the two-day camp at Dakota High School on Thursday. It is a life-skills / football camp attended mostly by players from the Detroit area, but also from around the country. A number of college coaches from various levels are here.

Notre Dame coach Brian Kelly will be a keynote speaker Friday, and Urban Meyer, coach of national champion Ohio State, Michigan State's Mark Dantonio and Michigan's Jim Harbaugh also are scheduled to speak, along with Western Michigan's P.J. Fleck and Eastern Michigan's Chris Creighton.

"There's a lot of good things that are being dispensed here at this particular event," Caldwell said after speaking to the campers. (I want to be part of anything like this with our city, and our city is obviously coming back, and it's a strong city, it's got a lot of history and tradition to it.

"Guys like Jerome Bettis that have come through the school system here in the city, but also there are a lot of young people here we hope someday they will be able to play for us with the Lions. This gives me an opportunity to talk to a group of young men who have a strong interest in what we do."

At one point during his speech, Caldwell, discussed a number of NFL players who deal with a variety of hardships during their lives.

"Every single one has a different story, (but) they had hardships," Caldwell told the campers. "The thing they did not do, they did not make any excuses. Handle disappointment. You get knocked down, it's how quickly you get up and respond is the key."

Bettis told the campers about how when he arrived in the NFL, he thought to himself, "I belong here." That was before he took his first serious hit during a preseason game.

"I got comfortable," Bettis said. "I thought, 'I made it, so now I'm good.' And that's not what it's about at any level. When you become the starting running back at your high school, it's not over. When you become the starting quarterback at your high school, it's not over.

"I had a chance to have great individual success, but the game is not about individual success. The game is about team success. The more success you have as a team, the individual success comes."

He reminded the players that education should always be the primary focus.

"You have to remember this – football, all it does, it teaches you about life," Bettis told the campers. "You have to remember that. I had success on the football field, but all it did was prepare me for life, for life after football.

"All you guys are not going to make it to the NFL. All you guys are not going to make it to Division I college (football). All you guys are not going to make it to Division II college. But if you have that work ethic and you're dedicated and you're committed, it doesn't matter where you go or what you do, you're going to be successful in life. That's what you have to take from this, guys. You're competing in life, not just football."

Caldwell was wearing his two Super Bowl rings from his days with the Indianapolis Colts. He said he rarely wears them, but wanted the players to see.

"Other than that, I never wear them," Caldwell said. "It's history. We need new ones now, right?"

But while Caldwell believes it's time for new Super Bowl rings, what doesn't need to be changed is the message to young men. Like Bettis, Caldwell said it's not all about football.

"There are some guys in this room who will play, but the messages being dispensed are messages for everybody," Caldwell said. "It doesn't matter if they will play in the NFL or whether they'll become governor or doctor or a lawyer, whatever it might be, all the of the principles are still sound and they do translate."

Bettis left the players with a lasting message.

"I grew up in the heart of Detroit, I went to public school and I was successful, and that tells you that anybody can do it," Bettis said. "Everybody has opportunity. You have to go out and grab it."

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