

Gladiator News

Bradenton Gladiators Volume 1, Issue 2

Posted by the Bradenton Herald Tue, July 24, 2007

Sweeting, Gladiators help youth through football

WEST SPORTS, Ryan T. Boyd x rboyd@bradenton.com

Giving back is a testament to a person's character. It speaks volumes. Whether it's donating time to the elderly or feeding the homeless, a good deed is a good deed. Edrick Sweeting's ambition is to do boundless deeds and countless favors for the betterment of our future.

He's giving back to kids the only way he figures they'll pay attention: through football.

"I felt there was a need for someone to step up," said Sweeting, standing on the DeSoto Boys & Girls Clubs practice field, "to give our youths something and let them know there are people out here that truly care about them."

That's why Sweeting was sweating it out Wednesday as the Bradenton Gladiators hosted the second annual Bradenton Gladiators Youth Football Mini Camp at the Boys & Girls Club.

The Gladiators are a minor league football team that plays in the Florida Football Alliance. Sweeting is the president of the Gladiators and also doubles as the team's quarterback.

Sweeting grew up on the hard streets of Miami. Guns and drugs were prevalent in his neighborhood. He eventually escaped the mean streets of Miami, and his family moved to Bradenton in the late 1980s, but he suffered more hardship. His mother died when the day before his 13th birthday. He had to grow up fast. For all those kids who have faced even a smidgen of what Sweeting has dealt with, the camp was for them. "I want to give them some kind of awareness to hopefully keep them on the right track," Sweeting said.

The football camp was

July 17-19 for athletes ages 6-15.

On Wednesday, there were about 40 children going through agility, speed, quickness, reaction and power drills. Sweeting said those are the five basic areas of

athletic performance that can be used in any sport. And the camp taught the athletes how to play every position on the football field, including special teams.

Jajuan Pollock, 12, said he was delighted to take part in the camp. "I enjoyed learning all of the positions on the football field," Pollock said. "When I was a kid, I ran a lot, and I think that is what attracted me to football. I love the sport."

Dequan Reddick said he was thankful for the opportunity. "This camp taught me how to do stuff right," said Reddick, 13. "We learned how to run routes and how to catch the ball correctly. I appreciate the camp, and if they have it again next year, I will come back."

The Gladiators also chat with the athletes about being good teammates and the importance of good sportsmanship. The organization's goal is to create future leaders in the community.

"As they go on in life, that leadership will build," Sweeting said. "That's the thing we are trying to instill in them. I tell the coach commend the kids just as much as you teach them. That will help build confidence in them."

But the Gladiators aren't just about sports. Academics are high on their priority list.

The organization offers a mentoring program, youth camps and a scholarship program throughout the year.

Next month, the Gladiators will sponsor a back-to-school drive in which they'll donate school supplies to students of all ages. They haven't nailed down a definitive date yet.

But Sweeting has definitely cemented his purpose in life.

"We're just trying to fill in the gaps," Sweeting said. "And give them something back."