

# the Sports page

## Shaping the future

Tinker man, former NFL players, provide boys structure through football

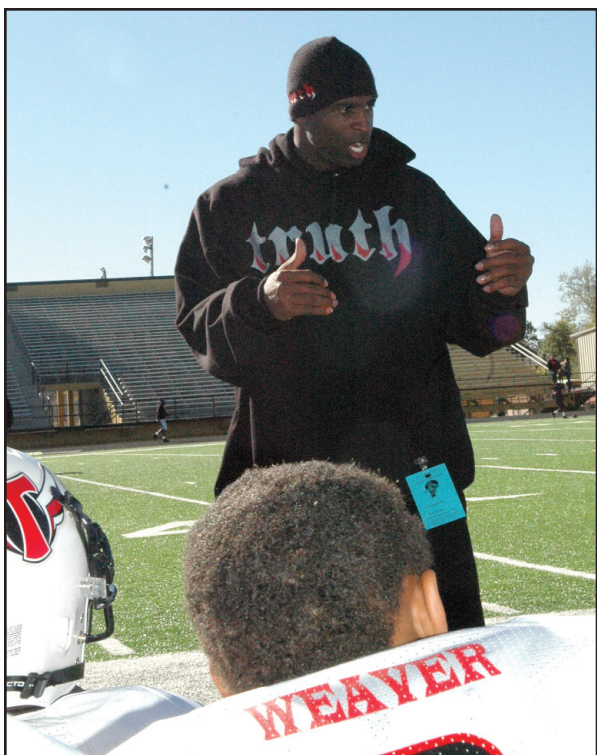
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How much can you learn from a good, old-fashioned trouncing? If your teachers are legendary NFL players Deion Sanders and Emmitt Smith, you'll learn a lot.

At least that's the message carried away by Tracey Walker, a 72nd Force Support Squadron recreation assistant and one of the coaches of the Midwest City Bombers youth football team, after losing 55-0 at the hands of Sanders' and Smith's Truth squad.

"You're going to win some and you're going to lose some. This was a good training aid and the boys all handled themselves really well," Mr. Walker said.

Mr. Walker's team, in the 8-9-year-old age group, was one of three teams to play Saturday in Midwest City against similarly aged opponents from the Truth. Their only previous loss had been in preseason, to the



Deion Sanders, legendary NFL cornerback, coaches boys from the Truth program 7 and 8-year-old youth football team. Mr. Sanders started the Truth program as a way to mentor boys, teaching them fundamental values and discipline and allowing them to "expand their view."



Air Force photos by Micah Garbarino

Tracy Walker, a recreation assistant with the 72nd Force Support Squadron, spends his free time coaching the Midwest City Bombers youth football team. Tracy is motivating his team during a tough battle with the Truth, a team from the youth program coached by former NFL player Deion Sanders.

9-10 year old Truth team. The Truth is a nationally-ranked football program which travels to face local teams and help raise awareness of youth football.

"We don't really look at any town as a small town. We'll go wherever there is good football, high energy and a positive attitude," Mr. Sanders said. "Our goal is to get the team outside the city limits, expand their vision."

While the Bombers' coaches wanted to win, or at least score a touchdown, said Walker, the final score couldn't ever have been the gauge for whether or not Saturday's slate of games at Rose Field were a success. After all, Sanders' 9-10-year-old team came into town undefeated — averaging 65 points per game without having allowed a touchdown by opposing teams all season.

For Walker, and the rest of the men coaching on a crisp, windy Saturday, the day was successful because the teams provide the boys an opportunity, not only in athletic competition, but also in life.

"I want them to be around positivity. In the long run, the kids I've coached and been around won't be able to say that no one ever cared about them," Mr. Walker said.

During the game, the coaches in the youth football program may not seem "caring" to their young players. One look at the sideline after a three-and-out series makes that obvious — grown men crouch down and stare into the facemasks of eight-year-olds, helmets are slapped, hard questions asked. But, the coaches do provide them something that may be lacking in their everyday lives, structure.

"We're there for them no matter what, to help them with their grades, or just to go to school and sit with them at lunch. You'll get something out of (the program) whether it's football or learning how to conduct yourself," Mr. Walker said.

The foundation that youth football coaches provide, proved to be a springboard to success for Emmitt Smith, a Hall-of-Fame member, the NFL's all-time leading rusher and partner in Sanders' Truth program.

"These local coaches are the unsung heroes in all



Tracy Walker, left, a recreation assistant with the 72nd Force Support Squadron, coached opposite NFL Hall of Famer Emmitt Smith and Deion Sanders during a youth football game in Midwest City Saturday. Emmitt Smith said coaches like Mr. Walker are the unsung heroes in football who volunteer their time to coach kids that go on to become great players.

this. They volunteer countless hours trying to instill values and discipline and that's what sports is all about," Mr. Smith said.

Mr. Walker's 9-year-old son, Rondel, said he loves spending time with his dad and that he and the other boys learn how to do things right, but that's not all he was focused on. The night before the game, he wished he could "fast-forward time so I could play these boys," and presumably come out a winner.

Well, for young athletes, it's good to dream, and dreams can become reality, but only if the fundamentals of life are in place.

"Local programs like this are extremely important. It's how I got my start and everyone I know that plays the game. It allows (boys) to dream," Mr. Smith said.

No matter what the score, that's a lesson Deion Sanders, Emmitt Smith and Tracey Walker are happy to teach every day.