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FOOTBALL NORTH

@ CLARKSON SS

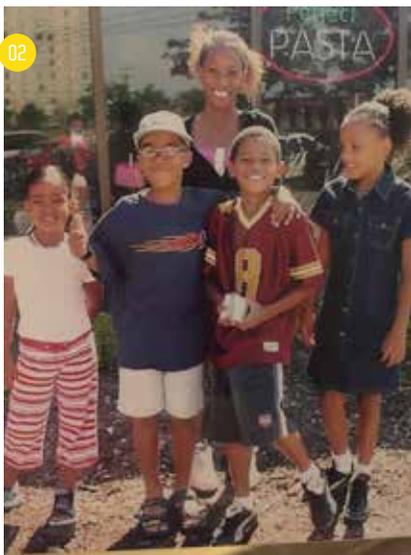
Submitted by: Vyjayanthi Janakiraman

Imagine getting up at dawn to get ready for your 8:00 am class. You have a full schedule of Grade 12 courses in a variety of subject areas. Then, after school, imagine spending two hours in football practice, or weight-training, or study hall. Imagine that this schedule leads to achieving your athletic and academic dreams. This kind of determination and grit is paying off for Clarkson students Deionte Knight and Tyrell Richards. Each looks to make the most of an opportunity to pursue their studies, and play college football in the United States next year.

Thanks to a phenomenal new football program at Clarkson Secondary School, participants can strive for academic excellence while still pursuing athletic opportunities. Knight, having signed with Arizona Western, and Richards with Syracuse University, are part of the Football North success story. Their future is certainly promising.

"It means the world," said Richards. "It gives me opportunities to pursue my dreams." When asked about coming to Clarkson, Richards added that "teachers were supportive, and the students were accepting of all these new faces."

Perhaps none of this would have been possible had Football North not chosen Clarkson as the place to run this program. Its partnership with Peel District School Board aims to present students with a unique opportunity to develop their passion for the sport, while still maintaining a traditional high school experience with high academic standards.



Staff at Clarkson are well prepared to help the new crop of students adjust to their school. Teacher Chris Pedersen-Brown meets with the players after school for study hall so she can offer support with their course work.

"Many of them already had a strong work ethic," Pedersen-Brown said. "They had to because they started their training in August, and have been working hard ever since."

Teachers at Clarkson respect what the players are able to achieve, considering the intensity of the practice and game schedule. Pedersen-Brown is well aware of the determination these students have.

"During their season they would have to go hours on the bus, with fifty other players and the coaching staff. They traveled to American schools in Ohio, Pennsylvania or Maryland to play and had to balance keeping us with course work while keeping an intense training and game schedule. And they still found time to work on all the assignments that every other student had to do."



As the players need to maintain high marks to qualify for acceptance to Canadian and American colleges and universities, the Football North students are always challenged to be a complete athlete. Part of that player development happens off the field. Deionte Knight, when asked about this point, believes Clarkson Secondary School is instrumental to his personal growth.

"The teachers are like your second mom and dad," Deionte joked. "They really do look out for your best interests, making sure that you do well in school and giving you that extra push to succeed."

When asked about the mentorship he's been receiving off the field and how it affects him throughout his life, Knight added, "it helped me develop as an athlete, but more importantly as a person. It allowed me to understand that football is more than just what's happening on the field. You have a team not only playing with you, but in your classroom and around the school as well, looking out for one another."

The opportunity to play against American high schools helps the players to develop the skills and mentality they will require to confront new challenges. Coaches believe Football North will soon be ranked among the top 100 high school football programs in North America. With values grounded in excellence both on and off the field, this is a realistic goal for Football North's coaching staff.

Larry Jusdanis, the prep team's Head Coach, is impressed by the team's performance this past year.

"The students did tremendously well, winning four games in their first year. That was unbelievable, especially since they were the first team to do so," Jusdanis said. "Many schools are extremely impressed with the character and talent in our players." Jusdanis added that, "they were able to integrate well with the academic aspect as well."

Coach Jusdanis believes planning early is essential to success in this competitive program. In particular, getting the students familiar with the academic challenges of high school, as well as the intensity of training, will allow the student-athletes to feel sufficiently prepared.

Coach Jusdanis is anticipating another great season in the future. The successes of team and Tyrell Richards and Deionte Knight, have made the Clarkson Community and the Peel Board proud. Clarkson Secondary School looks forward to seeing more great stories come out of the Clarkson Football North partnership.

01: Contracts all signed. 02: Deionte & Tyrell when they were just 7 years old. 03: Proud families look on as their boys sign their contracts.