

Camp goes beyond football

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SAN BERNARDINO - About 200 local junior-high and high-school football players are spending four days at Cal State San Bernardino learning from the pros.

The young athletes arrived Sunday and will live, eat and practice on campus through Wednesday.

"Can you imagine? You're on a college campus, and you're here for free," said retired NFL player Joe Johnson, who oversees the program.

The program was organized by members of the Kiwanis Club of East Rialto.

The entire cost of the program, which came to about \$180,000, was covered by donations. McGee said there is a three-year commitment to keep the camp going.

The camp, divided into junior-high and high-school levels, begins at 7 every morning and includes two practices a day.

"This is like two-a-day training camp," said Greg Bell, a former pro who founded Athletes for Life, a nonprofit that worked with the NFL to bring the camp to town.

Bell's goal is to teach the athletes life lessons and football because he predicted that none of them will make it to the NFL.

"We want them to have a university experience," said real-estate developer Scott Beard, one of the organizers.

The program includes such subjects as learning how to navigate the university's library and a conversation about steroids. To apply, students wrote a short essay on athletes as role models and sent in a letter of recommendation from a teacher, counselor or principal.

"It's not about football," said Johnson, who skipped a trip with his wife to Cancun this week to coach the camp.

It's really about learning such values as teamwork, dedication and commitment, he said.

James Washington, a former NFL player who went to UCLA, said he was impressed that the NFL players didn't just show up at the camp in their capacity as celebrities.

"They're actually coaching these kids," he said.

Despite the focus on education, many of the students who attended want to play football in college and then professionally.

"This is an opportunity for me to show them what I got," said Kenneth Butler, a 16-year-old junior at Bob Murphy County Community Day School in Rialto.

Marcell Wall, a senior at Eisenhower High School, said he was nervous the camp would be run like a boot camp. But he said he's having a lot of fun and enjoying living away from home.

"It's like real college," he said.

On Wednesday, a pair of Oakland Raiders, Justin Fargas and Nnamdi Asomugha, will stop by the camp.

All the excitement is making an impression on Wall.

"Oh, this stuff's tight," he said.

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