

Dayton's Native Son Gives Back

By Teri Miller Barker

Brandon McKinney's career began at the age of 7 when he played football for the Trotwood Wee Rams. After playing in grade school, he demonstrated his prowess on the fields for Trotwood Madison and Chaminade-Julienne high schools, and Michigan State University.

After 4 years as an MSU Spartan, he signed a contract with the San Diego Chargers as an undrafted free agent in 2006. Having outgrown his Wee Ram uniform, BJ McKinney now sports a number 91 on the back of his Charger jersey. Standing 6'2" and weighing over 300 pounds, McKinney, 24, is a force to be reckoned with on the field and in the community. As a college student, he helped run an on-campus summer day program for kids, and now he's bringing his passion for mentoring and empowering youth back home where it all began for him. McKinney established his foundation, BJ's Kids 91, to provide a positive role model to youth, while cultivating an appreciation for reading, literacy, and technology.

"I've always wanted to give back to the community," McKinney explained. "I've always wanted to be one of those types of people who made others feel good." Not many people who have achieved success can honestly say they did it alone. McKinney knows that he's no different. "I've been blessed," he said. "A lot... God has provided me with a great family." He attributes his success to his mother, Diane McKinney, who passed away earlier this year in February, his dad, Timothy McKinney, and his uncle, Edward Perry.

"One of the most interesting things that lead us to believe that Brandon was going to be successful was in his 8th grade year, when he realized that being a better student was going to land him better success," said Timothy McKinney of his son's enlightenment on the importance of good grades. "He began to take school seriously, more so than playing football or basketball, especially when he was grounded for the season because of his grades."

His passion for wanting to give back and help others derived from his own shortcomings as a child. "One of the biggest challenges for me when I was growing up was reading and comprehending," shared McKinney. "I want youth to know that even though you may not comprehend as well as others, you can still be successful. It's just going to take more time and a little extra work, which isn't a problem." According to statistics, the chances of a college football player making it to the NFL is about 1 in 20, or 5 percent. The humble, down-to-earth McKinney realizes that his family support, self-determination and a 'little extra work' helped him to beat the odds.

BJ's Kids 91, has an exciting line-up for the youth this summer, kicking off at noon, on June 15 at the Crowne Plaza, with "Wake Up Call," a Father's Day gospel brunch. The faith-based community, human service organizations, and businesses will collaborate to motivate and

empower our children, individuals, families and seniors in our communities. Fathers, grandfathers and men of honor will be recognized.

McKinney will present his speech “What Would I Be Without a Father?” and the keynote speaker, Reverend V.J. Smith of Minneapolis, Minnesota will challenge young men to “Man Up” and take responsibility for their actions. Smith is the president of MAD DADS. Visit www.minneapolismaddads.com to find out more about this organization.

The second event, Rock the Block, is a faith-based, neighborhood outreach program that will bring empowerment, spiritual uplift, and human service information to seven districts that are underserved in Dayton. Police security will be on hand as the youth participate in games and enjoy the show wagon. There will also be a reading contest where students will be given books to read. They must write a report that will be judged. Winners will receive prizes.

On August 3, “Wake Up Call,” Hope Festival, an all day event, will take place at Dave Hall Plaza. Gospel music and community service outreach tents throughout the park will benefit the Dayton Barber Cutt-Off For School Supplies, MAD DADS, and BJ’s Kids.

BJ’s Kids and MAD DADS, in conjunction with the City of Dayton, will present the first annual Barber Cutt-Off at the Dayton Convention Center on August 10. This program will provide book bags, supplies, and haircuts and styling free of charge for approximately 700 to 800 boys and girls.

For more information about these upcoming, outreach events, contact the organization at bjskids91@yahoo.com.