

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Education creates opportunity. Just ask Sean James.

After his college education at Missouri Southern State University, James enjoyed the opportunity to live and work in New York City. There, he learned a life-changing lesson — and it was provided by someone half his age.

“Joseph Williams was one of the first kids I met in New York,” recalls James, who served as a mentor for underprivileged children. “He was a 12-year-old kid from a single-parent family, living in the projects in Harlem, and I was a middle-class kid from the Midwest who didn’t understand that world at all.

“But he challenged me daily with the questions he would ask. He was wise beyond his years — he just needed

an opportunity.”

Working with such a child forced James to see things differently. “It was my wake-up call,” James says. “Joseph challenged me. I had to be a better person. There was a responsibility for me to be accountable and give him an opportunity.”

Williams wanted to be like his mentor James, a former college football player, so the two found a high school that offered fund Williams’ tuition. Driven by the notion that education creates opportunity, James continued to work with Williams, who posted a 3.5 grade-point average and earned a football scholarship to Central Connecticut State University. “He was the first person in



FIRST AND GOAL:

Former college football player Sean James (above) helps young people on (below) and off the field (right).



his family to go to college,” James says.

That experience with Williams gave James a clear vision. Recognizing that education created opportunity, James also realized that all children didn’t have the same opportunity to get an education. He decided to change that, and created the Sean James Student Athletes (SJSA) Foundation, an organization dedicated to helping young people cultivate their talents and interests.

Established in 2007, the SJSA Foundation helps middle school students excel in the classroom, in athletics and in the arts. It also teaches these children important life skills, helping them develop self-confidence, perseverance and a sense of accountability. The “student” in “student-athlete” means

everything to James.

“There’s a stigma with athletes that — regardless of how intelligent you are — people don’t think you’re really that smart,” James notes. “We train kids to understand that you have to work hard, study and learn to communicate before people will take you seriously.

“We want to crush the stigma that athletes are dumb. You’re doing kids a disservice if you don’t let them develop and take advantage of their intellect.”

And, like a coach teaching a linebacker proper tackling technique, James works closely with the children in the SJSA Foundation. “Once I give a kid a scholarship, I stay with him for three years,” James says. “He

BACK TO SCHOOL

JUST AS SEAN JAMES EXPECTS the best from his students, he also demands the best from himself. That’s why he has enrolled in business school at George Washington University, where he’s learning how to help his foundation flourish.

“You need to learn how to sustain a business, how businesses work, how to leverage your brand and get people involved,” James says. “If you want to create something beyond your name — the legacy you leave behind — you have to create something that others believe in as well.

“That’s why I’m going back to school.”



MORE INSPIRING STORIES

He was an All-American football player at Notre Dame.

He is a pro football Hall of Famer.

He serves as an Associate Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court.

These are just a few of the accomplishments in the remarkable life of Alan Page. To learn more about Page — as well as other former college athletes who have made a difference away from the spotlight of competition — check out the Buick Human Highlight Reel at ncaa.com/buick. There, you’ll find videos showcasing the inspiring true stories of student-athletes whose actions define human achievement.

has to be responsible. He understands that he has to study, do his homework and be accountable.

“Once I give a kid a scholarship, I’m involved with his life.”

James credits his parents and his upbringing with establishing strong principles and a foundation in his life. Today, he’s helping other kids establish similar foundations in their lives. To learn more about the SJSA Foundation, go to sjsafoundation.com.

To watch a video highlighting James’ work with children, visit the Buick Human Highlight Reel page at ncaa.com/buick. Through the Human Highlight Reel, Buick salutes human achievement. Beside James’ story, you can also see other inspiring videos of former college athletes who are committed to making a difference in society. B