

“ I know what sport brings; there are a lot of benefits ... I want to be an advocate for kids in sports. It helps with wellness issues, it teaches kids a lot of discipline and getting along with others as a part of a team. — Damon Allen

## SPECIAL MARKETING FEATURE

# QB GREAT DAMON ALLEN BACK IN PLAY

Damon Allen, arguably the greatest quarterback ever to play professionally in Canada, hung up his cleats for good after 23 seasons and four championships in the Canadian Football League, but it is apparent that he will never walk away from the game.

Allen, a holder of numerous CFL records including most passing yards and passing touchdowns, was on the gridiron recently at Toronto's York University mentoring what could be the next generation of quarterbacks.

The Damon Allen High School Quarterback Challenge was a historic day for amateur competition. At the inaugural Challenge on May 27, about 80 high school quarterbacks from Ottawa to Thunder Bay and all across Ontario showcased their skills, running through tires, throwing on the run and hurling footballs at moving targets.

It was a time for them to experience a key goal of the event: Challenge Day is intended to teach the young quarterbacks new skills, provide them quality time with Damon as a mentor, meet new friends and celebrate a shared passion for the game of football.

For Allen, who retired from the Toronto Argonauts in 2008 at the age of 44, the annual event is an opportunity to identify the quarterbacks of the future in Canada and to give back to the community.

“Ever since I was a kid my parents always talked about giving back,” says the future CFL Hall of Famer. “I want to continue to push the game, find new ways to allow kids to get better training techniques, that sort of thing. In a sense, I want to be the voice for amateur football in this country.”

Allen played the game of football virtually his whole life,



CFL great Damon Allen jokes with finalists in the first annual Damon Allen Quarterback Challenge.

starting at age six and growing up in a football family. His older brother Marcus is a member of the NFL Hall of Fame.

Although only a select few of the quarterbacks on York's University field may ever have the opportunity to don a professional jersey, playing football or other team sports offers participants so much more, Allen says. “I just know what sport brings; there are a lot of benefits in being involved in team sports such as football or just sports in general.

“I want to be an advocate for kids in sports. It helps with wellness issues, it teaches kids a lot of discipline and getting along with others as part of a

team,” adds Allen, who lives in Oakville, Ont. with his family.

Allen's Quarterback Challenge fits nicely with his other teaching and charitable endeavours. He runs the Damon Allen QB Academy, which trains and teaches amateur quarterbacks on the field and in the classroom, and by lending his name to the Grey Cup Event Night of Champions gala and an annual golf tournament, for which proceeds are given to amateur football in Canada.

In the case of the Quarterback Challenge, Allen presented university scholarships to the top three quarterbacks. Kyle VanWynsberghe, a quarterback with the Delhi

Raiders, won the top spot in the challenge and was awarded a \$20,000 tuition scholarship. Second-place Steven Courtney with Holy Trinity Catholic School, and third-place Derek Wendel, Centennial Secondary School, were awarded one-year university scholarships.

The Quarterback Challenge halftime activities included a charity fundraiser featuring Garrett Holmes, an 11-year-old quarterback with a passion to give back. Garrett tackled the Accuracy Challenge and thanks to “GO GARRETT GO” (www.gogarrettgo.com) sponsor Accretive Advisor raised \$2,500 for KidSport, a charity which provides financial support for

kids to participate in sports.

The event also featured a cheerleading competition volunteers from York University's football team, the Toronto Argonauts and Toronto Police Service, as well as the quarterback hopefuls.

“They went out there to compete, have fun and entertain the crowd,” says Allen, also the three-time Grey Cup MVP.

“It was very exciting and very hopeful, too.”

Not only does Allen hope to make the Quarterback Challenge an annual event, he wants to spread it beyond Ontario in coming years.

“As of right now there are other cities that are interested”

he says. “So yes, we will have it every year but I am also looking at how we can create an event like this nationally. where every city has something like it.”

One of the corporate sponsors of the Quarterback Challenge is Accretive Advisor. Its founder and chief executive, Randy Ambrosie, needed little introduction to Allen or his event.

“We were teammates together in Edmonton, we won the Grey Cup together in 1993,” he says. “It was just a great fit for us and certainly was wonderful for me personally to be involved with something that Damon was doing that is going to be great for kids.”

Ambrosie, who played in the CFL for nine seasons, was an offensive lineman charged with the protection of the quarterback and “probably saved Damon's life once or twice.”

As a Toronto Argonaut he was on the wrong side of a miraculous Damon Allen comeback in 1987 when he came off the bench and directed a come-from-behind win for the Eskimos.

Heidi Spannbaauer, a cause marketing consultant who was formerly the executive director of The Argos Foundation and is now working with Damon Allen and his marketing agency Partner, Compass Creative Media, to develop Damon's mentoring and advocacy efforts, sees the Quarterback Challenge as “the start of his vision of how he wants to give back to kids and Canadian football.

“We were so proud; he is a celebrity to so many people but [at the challenge] he led the show, he was on the field, he directed it,” she says. “He was there with the quarterbacks and I think that is what is going to define him so differently from other celebrities.”

## Helping kids, one TD at a time

Garrett Holmes is not your typical 11-year-old boy.

In fact, the Oakville, Ont., young lad has not been your average kid next door for some time now.

Last year, at the tender age of 10, he created a fundraising initiative called “GO GARRETT GO” to help disadvantaged kids, touchdown by touchdown.

A talented athlete and quarterback, Garrett raised \$20,352 for children's charities by scoring 16 touchdowns. Supporters had pledged a total of \$1,260 per touchdown he either threw or scored to reach that figure. Pledges were made online at www.gogarrettgo.com.

The money raised went to the Children's Miracle Network, the hospital of the donor's choice or Free the Children's Haiti relief fund.

A year later, Garrett's zeal for fundraising is undiminished. “This year my goal is to raise over \$20,000,” he says simply.

In this, the fundraising program's second year, Garrett has changed the fundraising criteria, which says a lot about the character of the young man who has attracted so much praise and attention for his efforts. Rather than raising money through touchdowns thrown or scored only by Garrett, supporters are being asked to pledge a dollar amount for each touchdown his football team, or goal his soccer team (he's playing two sports this summer) scores during the season.

As he says on his website, football and soccer are team sports and this way the work of all his teammates is represented as well (also he plays defence on soccer and would

not be able to raise that much as a defender based on his goals scored).

Attending Damon Allen's Quarterback Challenge at York University on May 27, he drew praise from participants, including the CFL legend himself. “I'm amazed and ecstatic, he is an inspiration,” Allen says. “The kid at 11 years old already gets it, about giving back and making a difference along with being a pretty good quarterback.

“He has shown tremendous ability to play the game but also leadership for such a young age.”

The relationship between the two quarterbacks began last year after Garrett attended Allen's quarterback camp last year in Mississauga, Ont. “He's wonderful,” says Garrett's mom, Leanne Holmes, of Allen. “He came out to the GO GARRETT GO launch again

this year at SickKids” in April.

How Garrett got started is as amazing a story as his current good works. On Christmas Day, at the age of seven, he was rushed to hospital after suffering a seizure. After transfer to SickKids Hospital in Toronto and a week-long stay it was determined that a virus attacked his system and caused epileptic-like seizures that would pass.

That “early brush with mortality,” as it is described on his website, changed the pre-teen. “After I left, I saw kids who were still there when I was there so I wanted to give back to the hospital and the patients,” he says.

This year, GO GARRETT GO has changed charitable beneficiaries. “I chose Children's Miracle Network and after talking with my dad we decided to involve KidSport,” he explains. “It kind of worked better with GO GARRETT GO.”

New beneficiary KidSport, a charity which financially



Damon Allen and Garret Holmes compare QB techniques.

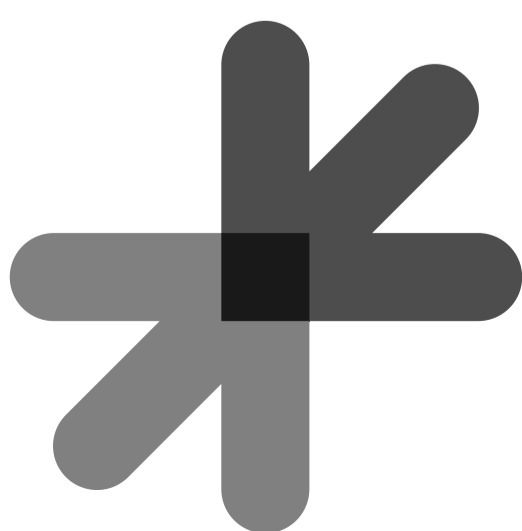
assists between 50,000 and 60,000 children every year to play organized sports, is humbled by the support from Garrett and his family. “He knows his family can support him [financially] in his endeavours, and he understands that there are a whole bunch of kids who can't,” said Dawn MacDon-

ald, executive director of KidSports Ontario who met with the organization's new back and his family at the Quarterback Challenge.

“For an 11-year-old boy to understand that and to have the empathy to do something about it, that is pretty amazing.”

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