**Local High School Football Team Tutors Young Students**

[Michelle Neeley](http://www.wuft.org/news/author/michelleneeley/) November 18, 2015 – WUFT News

On Mondays, members of the Hawthorne High School football team swap footballs for books and tackling practice for reading practice.

Instead of going straight to practice after class, they take a short walk to Chester Shell Elementary School to tutor students who are behind in reading as part of the [Barbara Bush Foundation’s Teen Trendsetters](http://barbarabush.org/our-solutions/teen-trendsetters-reading-mentors/) program.

Liz Stark, the Alachua County Public Schools’ volunteer coordinator, said this is the first year athletes have been tutors for the program.

She said she tried to implement the program at Shell before, but there wasn’t much interest from the high school students. However, the athletes are a captive audience since they are already staying after school for practice.

There are four schools in the district that have a Teen Trendsetters program, but the other schools usually have no problem finding high school students to volunteer, Stark said.

“At a lot of the other schools we pull from the Key Club or the Honors Society — just anybody who wants to do it,” Stark said.

Liz Williamson, the assistant principal at Shell Elementary, said Hawthorne High School’s head football coach, former UF and NFL player Cornelius Ingram, helped get the athletes involved in the program.

“Coach Ingram really values giving back to the community,” Williamson said.

Although football season is over for the year, most tutors came back because they are also on the basketball team.

Nick Baskin, a 10th grader on the basketball team, tutored for the first time Monday. He said he enjoyed helping his student read and figure out words she did not know.

Every week, the students get a book to take home, Williamson said.

The students are selected for the program based on factors like test scores and if they would benefit from having a positive role model, she said.

Debbie Bass, the after-school program director at Shell Elementary, said she doesn’t think the tutors realize how much the students look forward to seeing them on Mondays.

“They always ask, ‘Are they coming, are they coming?’” she said.

She said that the other week she noticed a few of the tutors arriving at the school late, and she made it a point to tell them just how important their visits are to the students.

Most of the players are motivated to be good tutors, even if they do not realize the impact they make on the younger students’ lives, Bass said.

“When I first came here, my student didn’t want to read that much,” said D.J. Harris, an 11th grader on the basketball team. “Now she always comes ready to learn.”

Teen Trendsetters is a win-win situation for both the elementary students as well as for the high school athletes!



Devin Lawrence, a member of the Hawthorne High School football team, helps a first-grade student, Jonas, with his reading. Students at Chester Shell Elementary School get extra reading help from Hawthorne High School athletes after school on Mondays through the Barbara Bush Foundation’s Teen Trendsetters program. Photo by Michelle Neeley/WUFT News.