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'Coach Rahim' prepares Friendship Academy students for football and life

By Jeannine Hunter, August 01, 2013



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It's a sweltering summer Saturday, and Coach Aazaar Abdul-Rahim and a handful of adults are working with hundreds of children at his 11th annual free football camp in Anacostia. The Friendship Collegiate Academy coach, whistle in mouth, straw hat shielding his eyes from the sun, is in constant motion: He barks instructions about formations. He congratulates a player on a well-executed play. He jogs up and down the sideline making sure at every turn that each camper leaves a better football player, with a better understanding of the game they love.

But as important as the daily instruction is, it is in the stands where Abdul-Rahim's presence means the most to many of the families of the boys who have attended the day-long camp. That's where Tamika Edmonds is watching her 10-year-old son Tyvon stand in formation on the field.

"Coach Rahim" helped her oldest son, Daquan Wiley, get into college, she said. This fall, the Lackey High School graduate will study at Geneva College in Pennsylvania. "He sent out a lot of information to different colleges about my son; he helped people look into him," she said, smiling at the memory. Without the coach, Edmonds said, she doesn't know where Daquan would be.

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This is the essence of Abdul-Rahim, who during the year is known as the coach of one of the most acclaimed football programs in the city but year-round is known as a man who wants only to help the city's young men excel at life.

While there are many in Washington who are pushing young people to do better in life, few in recent memory have the résumé of Abdul-Rahim: For the past three years, more than 50 seniors at Friendship have earned full rides to college. And that doesn't include the many others, such as Daquan Wiley, who benefit from the

coach's passionate push.

"I think he's a person who cares for young people," said Mike Duran, a social worker in the city's Department of Human Services who was helping him mentor youths that day in June. "He believes strongly in giving back. He always says he was influenced by someone, and tries to help others and develop others to want to give back, too."

Known affectionately as Coach Rahim, Abdul-Rahim came to the Northeast school in 2003, first as a junior-varsity coach and guidance counselor. Despite not having a home football field or a real practice field, the team is becoming known as football powerhouse. In December, the team captured the inaugural citywide football

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championship when it defeated Dunbar High School, 48-12.

But it is Abdul-Rahim's success in getting kids to college that makes him most proud.

"I cannot recall a kid that was with our team the entire year that did not graduate," he said in an interview. "The school emphasizes graduation, so the success rate is beyond just the football team," said the former cornerback at San Diego State, who went to Dunbar.

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"Given the significant facility challenges he has faced over the years and continues to face, he manages every year to set the bar high, each year surpassing the last," D.C. Council member Jack Evans (D-Ward 2) said in an e-mail. "His dedication, perseverance and stick-to-it-ness are phenomenal and it is an honor to support him."

For Abdul-Rahim, the success in getting his players and other students into college is a year-long effort. The 36-year-old husband and father of two spends most Sundays during the school year providing skills and development training for athletes at a practice field in Maryland. Through his D.C.-based nonprofit group, Positive Choices, Inc., he partners with organizations such as the anti-domestic violence group Becky's Fund, the Military Bowl and Events DC throughout the year to provide programming aimed at teaching life skills and building character, not just muscles and on-the-field stats.

Abdul-Rahim is an affable man whose stature, demeanor and attire make him blend in very well among students. During the final weeks of the school year, clad in shorts and a T-shirt, he darts through hallways, stopping every so often to greet students with affirmations and requests — "Hey, come see me about what you're gonna do this summer; I may be able to help," or "Practice starts at 1 p.m.; make sure you're on time."

"He's working real hard. He has a year-round program, and when the college coaches see that you have a program that's structured and organized and the players are learning the fundamentals, it's going to be successful and it's going to attract attention," said Butch McAdams, who hosts "In and Out of Youth Sports," a radio show on WOL 1450 AM. "There's no magic to it, it's just hard work and commitment."

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cherylhouston wrote:
8/4/2013 11:14 PM UTC

This is an excellent article. It is exceptionally well-written. The coach deserves all the support he can get to further his program.



topryder1 wrote:
8/2/2013 5:15 PM UTC

Nice work Coach! Keep the welfare of young people at the heart of your work.

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