

First and Goal: A game plan for life

Pro athlete's help students succeed in and out of the classroom

By Milani Arguelles

For former Baylor football player Tyrone Smith, returning to his alma mater and giving back to his community were two things he wanted to following his professional football career. So, a few years ago, Smith went from tackling and touchdowns to teaching and traveling.

With the help of fellow NFL players Derrick Harris and Darnell Walker, Smith co-founded First and Goal Inc., a college-experience program for high school students. Established in 1999, the nonprofit organization combines mentoring, motivational speaking, leadership, conflict resolution and academic achievement curricula to help thousands of students from the Houston area. The programs are held on college campuses across Texas, and for two weeks in June, Baylor hosted one of the programs for the first time.

Smith, BA '95, played for the San Francisco 49ers from 1996-98 and the Washington Redskins in 1999. At the end of the '99 season, Smith retired to work full time at First and Goal Inc. "I always wanted to come back to Baylor in one way or another," Smith said. This venture gave him the opportunity to do that "with a program that empowers kids. We give students the ultimate college experience," he said.

The 123 high school students enrolled in the summer program at Baylor took four introductory level courses in business, psychology, law and computer science Web design and participated in leadership initiatives activities. They were part of Project Grad Houston, a nonprofit organization that works to increase graduation and college attendance rates for economically disadvantaged students. After completing at least two different college experience programs and maintaining at least a 2.5 GPA, the students are awarded a \$4,000 scholarship for college.

"It was a great opportunity to empower the youth to go to college, graduated and learn how to lead in a different environment," said Xavier Whitaker, Baylor assistant director for leadership activities.