

by ANDREW DeGRAFF  
Herald Intern

## ***Former NFL Star Banks Visits B&G Club***

*Statesboro, GEORGIA – JULY 9, 2009* – The Boys and Girls Club of Bulloch County was treated to an online and in-person sports interactive experience Thursday that brought in two former NFL players and introduced the computer program Learning Through Sports.

Founder and CEO of L.T.S. Brian Shulman and former NFL quarterback Tony Banks made their visit to Statesboro in order to promote the software and teach the kids about being prepared to seize opportunities and make the correct choices.

After a brief introduction by Shulman, Banks spoke to the kids about his own story and the road he traveled to escape his tumultuous upbringing. Banks specifically talked about not using poor circumstances as a crutch and how sports allowed him to escape.

Shulman sees the value of having a person who is in a position of influence and has shared the conditions come in and speak the kids.

“We have a host of former college and pro athletes that tell their story. We don’t spend a lot of time talking about their athletic things and their Super Bowl rings because all of that takes care of itself,” said Shulman. “What we really want to do is articulate to these kids that (they were) exactly where these kids are. Tony’s story is really unique because he’ll tell you, ‘I had an angry mom’ and that connects with these kids. Then he comes back and says that coming home and not hearing the right thing cannot be their excuse. I think what we are trying to do is make that connection with a real person so the kids can see, ‘here’s a path, here’s a plan, here’s a role model I can follow and model myself by.’”

The nine-year-old company based out of Birmingham, Ala., creates curriculum to help kids stay in school and motivate them to be engaged in learning through video games, sports video games and technology.

The interactive software combines educational questions with sports video games. When the kids answer questions correctly, they are allowed access to play video games. The emphasis is on the children learning the material and realizing that without the knowledge they cannot gain access to the fun side.

“Sports is the hook,” said Banks, who works for a portion of the company that puts athletes in regions throughout the country to try to “connect the dots” when it comes to education, sports development and the critical thinking development kids can gain from sports.

They teach math and reading, but according to Shulman and Banks, they put an emphasis on character-ed. They believe the Boys and Girls Club is a perfect environment because like most kids, they get bored and the B & G Club is trying to so the same things L.T.S. is – keep the kids engaged and keep them excited about school.

Banks travels with the company in part because he believes his legacy is no longer tied to the football field.

“I love doing this, I like sharing my story with these kids. My story can relate with a lot of these kids. It’s just a story about overcoming some adversity. Being a black quarterback and being told it wasn’t a popular position, I can teach these kids some things I am very proud of and that their dreams are possible as well,” said Banks.

“My legacy for my son and my family is not going to be Tony Banks the quarterback because that is who I was. Who I am now is a father and husband and a guy in the community who is very involved. I see these kids’ eyes, I see when they look up, they are engaged and they want to know what I have to say. Us as athletes, if we can have a positive message, not just our athletic prowess, it will go a lot longer way,” said Banks.

The B & G Club of Bulloch County caters to kindergarten through 12th grade, dividing the kids into k-5th grade and 6th-12th grade. They are far ahead of most after school and summer programs in that they form structured rotations to teach the kids real world experience using the end product to teach a means instead of just expression.

Director of Development Mike Backus – former (and legendary) Georgia Southern basketball coach – made it clear that the B & G Club is a youth development facility and not just a recreational daycare. The k-5th graders are divided into their relative classroom years and rotate stations and activities every hour. All activities for the younger children are designed to promote life skills such as social, education, life, recreation and freedom. The 6th-12th graders have a curriculum designed to be more specific in developing career goals. The Club has an onsite radio station and music recording studio as well as a fashion design program.

Backus and Executive Director Mike Jones feel the program is extremely important for not just the development of life skills, but to give the kids an alternative option to life on the streets. The program tracks all of their attendees through college and offers scholarships and jobs post-education.

A telling stat for the Club is that every child who attended the Club for one or more years has raised their grade average in school by at least one letter grade.

“I see hope. I really do. Days like today are where we see the kind of impact we can make,” said Shulman.

The Club is a non-profit organization, completely autonomous from all other branches and they exist strictly through donations and fundraisers. For instance, on September 10, 2009, the Club will host their 4th Annual Steak and Burger Dinner at the First Baptist Church of Statesboro. Keynote speaker this year will be Former Lt. Colonel Steve Russell who commanded the unit responsible for the capture of Saddam Hussein. Dinner sponsorships range from \$100 - \$5000. Also available to the public is child-sponsorships.

For more information about Learning Through Sports please visit their website at [www.learningthroughsports.com](http://www.learningthroughsports.com) and for information regarding the Boys and Girls Club of Bulloch County please visit them online at [www.bgcbulloch.org](http://www.bgcbulloch.org).

Reference online: <http://www.statesboroherald.com/news/article/18463/>