

Super Bowl Champion Visits DSCP as Part of Youth Mentoring Program

Story and Photos by Christina DiMemmo

Courtesy of the Defense Supply Center Philadelphia

Hank Poteat, an NFL player for the New England Patriots, visited the Defense Supply Center Philadelphia recently as part of a youth mentoring program. Bernard Theodore, a student athlete from Bishop McDevitt High School in Wyncote, Pa., shadowed Poteat to experience a day in the life of an NFL player. Poteat had been training in the Philadelphia area in preparation for this year's football season. Theodore joined Poteat for a training session before beginning the community relations leg of their Philadelphia tour.

Theodore accompanied Poteat to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia to visit seriously ill children hospitalized there. As a way of offering comfort to the patients and their families, Poteat met with the young football fans and autographed pictures for them. After chatting with CHOP patients and staff, Poteat and his shadow journeyed to DSCP for a visit with DSCP's Commander, Army Brig. Gen. Jesse Cross.

Poteat is a Pennsylvania native who was born in Harrisburg and originally drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the third round of the 2000 NFL draft. He signed with New England just before their 2005 postseason run as the Patriots won their third Super Bowl in four years. During an office call with DSCP's Commander, Poteat introduced his "shadow" to General Cross and thanked him for meeting with them. The meeting was an opportunity for Theodore to observe other role models who have been successful in fields not related to professional sports and entertainment.

After welcoming his guests and briefly explaining the DSCP troop support mission, Cross stressed the need for positive role models in every teenager's life. "You are not young forever," he told Theodore. "After you play football, there are going to be some lean years if you didn't apply yourself during the harvest years." Cross gave examples of professional football players who saved money and started businesses in various industries after their sports careers ended. He stressed how tenuous fame can be and related it to his career within the Army. "Somebody is always waiting to move into your seat. By this time next year, I'll know who's taking my place as Commander of DSCP. This is a two-year assignment for me and then I go somewhere else."

Poteat warned against falling in love with the sports star lifestyle. "Athletes are pampered by colleges and the NFL. The key is not to fall in love with that. Because if you do, when it's over, you don't know what to do with yourself. Once you're out of the league, no one cares who you are."

Cross stressed the need for mentors and the importance of being coachable. “You’ve got to rely on other people. You’ve got to rely on a team. In this life, you can’t rely on any one thing to make you successful. Listen to the wisdom of others and draw from their experiences. . . learn from them,” he said.

Berlin Theodore, Bernard’s older brother, works as a business manager in DSCP’s Medical Supply Chain. Berlin planned the mentoring event as a way to engage young people in mentoring partnerships and to see the importance of such a relationship. During a radio interview later that afternoon, Berlin told listeners that he wanted to “introduce youths with people who have been successful in their fields and have helped others realize their potentials. We hope this will inspire young adults to think about what they want to be and what they want to do.” He closed by challenging successful individuals to find out how they can give back to the community. Berlin is a DLA (Defense Logistics Agency) Contingency Support Team veteran who just returned from a six-month deployment to Kuwait. While deployed, he worked as a multi-class commodity specialist expediting customer orders from the war theater.

Before departing from DSCP, General Cross presented each visitor with a Commander’s coin, DSCP t-shirt, DSCP baseball cap and a signed copy of his official photo.

Bernard Theodore, Philadelphia’s student athlete of the day, described his shadowing experience as lots of fun. “Mr. Poteat is a cool dude and real down to earth,” he said. Bernard also described how the day’s activities involved much more than press cameras following around an NFL sports figure.