

Toledo family glad to have made trip to clinic

By Tim Smith
Staff Writer

Most of the exuberant participants at Friday night's Sunshine's Skills & Drills Football Clinic didn't have to travel very far to make it to the first-annual event at Plymouth-Canton Educational Park.

But if they had to, they would have traveled as far — if not farther — as Lyndon Parsons' family of Toledo, Ohio, did to be there for an inspirational night.

The first-annual event, the brainchild of 10-year-old Connor Sherman of Canton, provided Plymouth Wildcats and Our Lady of Good Counsel players and coaches the chance to help youngsters with special needs enjoy football fun and instruction.

"We actually heard about it through one of his Special Olympics groups that he's involved in, for special needs hockey," said Tony Parsons, whose 14-year-old son Lyndon was afflicted at birth with Sturge-Weber syndrome. "One of our coaches was telling us about it and so we looked into it and we're here."

Sturge-Weber syndrome is a rare disorder that impacts the nervous system and often results in seizures.

Tony and Lisa Parsons (Lyndon's parents) proudly stood on the P-CEP varsity turf field as Lyndon trotted over to show them his participation trophy.

All 43 participants received those trophies after successfully finishing a quartet of football stations (for quarterbacks, wide receivers, running backs and offensive linemen).

When Lyndon was asked what he learned during the clinic, he quickly repeated

what on-field "buddy" and Plymouth varsity football player Kevin Justice said: "How to throw, how to catch."

He earned it

Although Lyndon does not play football, he was happy to leave with a trophy as well as a pat on the back for a job well done from Justice.

"He was always first, he always hustled," said Justice, who is entering his senior season with the Wildcats. "He earned his trophy today, that's for sure."

Justice then turned toward the youngster and noted that "You worked up a sweat, didn't you Lyndon?"

According to Tony Parsons, it was important to make the trip up to Canton in order for Lyndon to learn "a little bit more about teamwork and learning to hustle" not to mention providing a boost to the teen's self-esteem.

Asked if the family was glad to have made the trek to Sunshine's Skills & Drills Football Clinic, Tony's response was a quick and emphatic "absolutely."

Parsons added that the Wildcats might even get some favorable karma out of the deal when the 2014 season plays out. "The football team that was involved here today, I think is going to get something very special out of this."

That wouldn't be necessary as far as Justice is concerned, noting that the players and coaches already were rewarded just for being able to spend the time with a group of football-loving kids.

"It is really nice to give back to the community," said Justice, smiling.

tsmith@hometownlife.com
Twitter: @TimSmith_Sports



Having finished Sunshine's Skills & Drills Football Clinic, participants and their buddies run through the inflatable Wildcat head. PHOTOS BY JOHN KEMSKI | EXPRESS PHOTO



Cade Tjernagel, 11, of Chelsea, plays catch with his buddy, Plymouth player Jacob Miller (not pictured).



Plymouth football players shadowed their football clinic buddies for the entire night.



Plymouth player Kalen Dunham (left) gives all his attention to 5-year-old Lincoln Nicholls at one of the stations. Lincoln has spina bifida.

CLINIC

Continued from Page B1

to-be fifth-grader at Workman Elementary School and a quarterback at OLGC.

On target with idea

Like a quarterback spotting an open wideout crossing the field, an opportunity presented itself at school and Connor delivered on it.

During something called "Genius Hour" in the classroom of Workman fourth-grade teacher Melanie Gray, Connor proclaimed his desire to do something for those who through no fault of their own couldn't experience the sport he has loved since he was a toddler.

It didn't take him long to envision putting on a football clinic.

"I wanted to come up with this idea because I love football, it's my favorite sport," said Connor, who like all other volunteers sported yellow T-shirts emblazoned with the clinic's name on the front. "I thought every kid should have the opportunity to play it."

"One of my best friends, Shane Hanson, his mom works with special-needs kids, she's with them all the time. I see them and I thought it was cool if they could be here, and it kind of inspired me."

Gray explained that her students were given time every Friday to work on a project they were passionate about.

"And Connor's passion was creating a football camp for everybody, that everybody should have a chance (to participate) no matter what their needs were," Gray said. "He and his parents (Erik and Jennifer) took it by the reins, and here we are today. Which is amazing."

Including participants (ages 3-14), family members, volunteers, players and coaches, there were about 200 people at the clinic (which Connor wants to become an annual event).

Just humongous

"We are (proud)," Erik Sherman said. "What started out as a classroom project obviously morphed into something humongous, and that's what we're witnessing here."

Connor, also a third-year starting quarterback for OLGC who wears his hair in a longish fashion, already had a good name for the endeavor since his nickname for several years has been "Sunshine."

According to the official website for Connor's program (www.sunshinesfootballclinic.org), it was a natural for him to get the same nickname as the long-haired quarterback in the 2000 movie *Remember the Titans*.



Toledo's Parsons family took part in Sunshine's Skills & Drills Football Clinic. Lyndon Parsons (second from left) is shown with his buddy, Plymouth football player Kevin Justice. Lyndon's parents are Lisa (far left) and Tony (far right). JOHN KEMSKI | EXPRESS PHOTO

SPORTS ROUNDUP

Golf event to help military veterans

Fellows Creek Golf Club in Canton will participate Monday, Aug. 11, in the World's Largest Golf Outing to benefit the Wounded Warrior Project.

The event will involve thousands of golfers and hundreds of courses throughout the country.

The cost is \$200 for a foursome, \$100 for a twosome and \$50 for a single golfer. The fee includes a hat and golf ball with the WLGO logo, greens fee, shared cart, lunch, prizes and awards.

Registration begins at 8 a.m. There will be a shotgun start at 9 a.m., followed by an awards ceremony at 3 p.m.

Golfers can register at worldslargestgolfouting.com or fellowscreekgolf.com. For more info, call Fellows Creek at 734-728-1300.

Participants will have a chance to win a trip for four to the Nike Campus, which will include all fittings for custom-fit Nike irons and a Nike hat-and-shirt package.

Generals softball tryouts

The Michigan Generals will have softball tryouts from 6-8 p.m. the following evenings at North Farmington:

» 16U: Tuesday, Aug. 12, and Tuesday, Aug. 19; 14U: Wednesday, Aug. 13, and Wednesday, Aug. 20; 12U: Thursday, Aug. 14; and Thursday, Aug. 21.

Pitchers and catchers should plan on staying a little longer. Registration begins at 5 p.m. each night.

Go to michigangeneralss.com for a registration form

and more information.

Glenn volleyball fundraiser

John Glenn High School's volleyball team will have a golf fundraiser Saturday, Aug. 9, at Fox Hills Golf Course.

The cost is \$125 per player or \$500 per foursome. The cost includes 18 holes of golf, lunch on the turn, unlimited range balls, raffle ticket and steak dinner.

The check-in time is noon; play begins at 1:30 p.m. The registration deadline is Sunday, Aug. 3.

For more information, contact Walker at 719-339-6159.

Precision Baseball tryouts

Tryouts for the Precision Patriots 11-U travel baseball team are scheduled 5:30-7:30 p.m. Monday, July 28, at Precision Baseball, located at 7835 Market Street in Canton.

The Patriots will have winter indoor practices and training, league and tournament play. Players must be age 11 or younger May 1, 2015.

Players from surrounding areas are welcome. Any questions can be sent to precisionpatriots11u@gmail.com.

Churchill golf outing

The fourth annual Churchill softball golf outing fundraiser will be Sunday, Sept. 28, at Idyl Wyld Golf Course.

The cost is \$65 for golf and dinner. Dinner only is \$20. The format is a four-person scramble.

Contact Steve Gentilia at 734-776-1716 (churchillsoftball@gmail.com) or Kevin McHugh at 734-748-8520 (kmchugh12@yahoo.com).

the south end zone.

"We'll have everyone face the end zone, ultimately we want to score touchdowns," Jones said. "Turn around, this here is the end zone, that's where we score touchdowns!"

"First it's important to know what a receiver is. A receiver is the guy on the football field that runs out, the quarterback throws him the ball, he catches it and scores touchdowns. Has a lot of fun. But first we got to know how to stand."

Players lined up along the goal line and tossed miniature footballs to their buddies some five yards away.

One of the buddy tandems enjoying the receiver station included 7-year-old Peyton Domzalski and Plymouth junior Darwin Filey.

"Boom," said Filey after Peyton — who is wheelchair-bound due to spina bifida — fired a perfect spiral his way.

"I love it, I like seeing kids that have this opportunity to come out here and showcase their talents even though they're not the same as everybody," Filey emphasized. "It inspires me because I'm blessed."

"It just shows me how blessed I am, how lucky I am to be in the position I am."

Way to go

Over at the station for linemen, Plymouth senior Jacob Noll worked with 6-year-old Joey Shanlikian, who has autism.

"Come on, Joey," encouraged Noll, clapping his hands.

Just as enthusiastic was one of the coaches, Terry Sawchuk. "Check your stance, look up," Sawchuk reminded the kids. "That's a good stance."

Meanwhile, Plymouth player Jonah Peterson and 6-year-old Jonah Connors (who has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) were teaming up to learn about blocking.

"We've just been helping him with technique and everything," Peterson said. "He's been doing really well, he knows everything. Best one out here, right Jonah?"

He and plenty of other kids came away from Sunshine's Skills & Drills Football Clinic feeling good about themselves and their new-found football knowledge, too.

tsmith@hometownlife.com
Twitter: @TimSmith_Sports