



Perris News

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Six Perris Patriots Players Awarded Football Scholarships

They came to the Perris Patriots Football League as kids, eager to improve their gridiron skills, soak up the fundamentals of the game, become good teammates and learn something about life in the process.

The six high-school graduates took home all those lessons and more.

Along the way, they developed the talents that attracted big-time college scholarships.

The City of Perris recently recognized the six athletes in a ceremony at the P-Town Combat Sports Academy.

The six, including Ronald Powell, the top prep football recruit in the country, received certificates of appreciation from Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and City Council members Rita Rogers and Mark Yarbrough.

Powell, a graduate of Rancho Verde High School who will play for the University of Florida Gators, was joined by fellow Perris Patriots alumni Deontrae Cooper, who will attend Colorado State University; his brother, Deontae Cooper, a University of Washington recruit; Dennis Fite, who will play for Southern Utah University; Jamie Irving, who committed to the University of Texas, El Paso and Robert Smith, who accepted a basketball scholarship to Santa Clara University.

Each four-year scholarship, which includes room and board, tuition and all-education related expenses, is estimated at \$200,000.

The City of Perris has worked hand-in-hand with Perris Patriots founder Andre Mitchell and his staff for almost 10 years. The City provides the league with a complex of playing fields, which attract hundreds of football players every weekend. Last year, the City opened the P-Town Combat Sports Academy to teach Perris youngsters boxing and self-defense skills.

"Without the City of Perris' support, we would not be here," said Mitchell, a Los Angeles police officer who specializes in tracking down fugitives. "Their support has been outstanding. They have gone beyond the call of duty." Keynote speaker Kermit Alexander, a former defensive back with the San Francisco 49ers, told the six scholarship recipients that they have become role models to younger players.

"It's you who are going to teach kids how to do better," Alexander said. Your job is to do the best you can, because we will not accept anything less. We love you. We need you. We expect you to do well because of the background you have."

Several of the football stars said they learned valuable lessons in Perris, lessons they will rely upon as they advance upon their athletic careers.

"I am going to remember everyone who stayed behind me and who made my dream come true," said Powell.

"Everyone around the program and the City of Perris was positive, stayed positive and continues to stay around and support us."

Deontrae Cooper said growing up in Perris changed his life for the better.

"It helped me decide to do something positive with my life," he said.

Mayor Busch and Council members Rogers and Yarbrough urged the student/athletes to return to Perris to keep the City informed of their progress in the classroom and the gridiron. Busch reminded them further that while they have great talent, the commitment of parents, coaches and teammates also made them star athletes.

"I hope you remember the sacrifices of the people who made this possible," Busch said. "Please don't forget them." Rogers said she hopes the athletes will make an appearance at a future City Council meeting.

"I am not surprised that the talent this community has produced has gone this far," she said. "Take it as far as you can. Make your dreams come true."

Yarbrough said the City of Perris cannot be prouder of its youth, adding the six big-time athletes have helped put Perris on the map as a talent-rich athletic training ground. He predicted big things from them in the years to come.

"They represent some of the best of our City," he said.



Ronald Powell, the nation's top collegiate football recruit, autographs a young fan's football while Deontrae Cooper, another Perris Patriots graduate, looks on.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, City Councilwoman Rita Rogers and Councilman Mark Yarbrough attended the appreciation ceremony at the P-Town Combat Sports Academy.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch shakes hands with Ronald Powell during the awards presentations at the P-Town Combat Sports Academy.



Deontrae Cooper, his twin brother, Deontae Cooper, Andre Mitchell and Ronald Powell at the awards banquet.



Former Pro-Bowl cornerback Kermit Alexander addresses the crowd while Perris Patriots Football League founder Andre Mitchell observes.