



COACHING FOR LITERACY

Florida State's Rathan-Mayes enjoys work with children



By Jacob Rosuck

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Illiteracy has always been a problem in the United States, one that continues to be an issue to this day.

Teaching children to read at an early age is crucial to their learning and growth. Kids today often want to stay inside and watch television or play video games, but very few ever just pick up a book and start reading.

That is why, using the power of sports, Florida State guard Xavier Rathan-Mayes and associate head coach Stan Jones have teamed up with the Coaching for Literacy program to help improve literacy among children.

"I was happy to jump on board and get Coach Hamilton involved and our program involved and try to find a way to continue to help young people learn the value and the life skills that you get out of being avid readers," Jones said.

Coaching for Literacy's goal is to raise awareness about illiteracy and raise funds to help children learn to read so that they can be successful. In the span of three years, Coaching for Literacy has directly impacted more than 7,500 children and supported 25 literary programs nationwide.

"I think it's just a great program to be able to get out there and do things with kids, to be a part of the community and help children become better people, become better in school and just teach them certain things in life," Rathan-Mayes said.

Using the sports platform is extremely beneficial for the program. Sports are very popular with young children, and when these kids see a college athlete come in and speak to them about reading and working hard, it motivates them to go out and learn.

"Sports is such a powerful tool in today's age," said Rathan-Mayes. "The fact that we have that tool and the ability to use it in different ways to affect people's lives is something I pride myself in."

As a student-athlete, Rathan Mayes knows a thing or two about putting in hard work in the classroom to see results in the real world.

"School is the key to everything; without school, without reading, it's tough to get places," Rathan-Mayes said.

"If you keep yourself focused in those areas and work hard to reach your dreams everything will fall into place."

Jones agrees with Rathan-Mayes

"Don't look at reading as boredom ... don't just read the 140 characters on social media; read things that are going to add to your knowledge base, because knowledge is power," Jones said.

Rathan-Mayes does not see reading to children as a burden, but instead as an opportunity to help.

"I think it is kind of like my calling, to be able to help, to help kids, to help with literacy," said Rathan-Mayes, who frequently visits Oak Ridge Elementary to read to the students.

Derrick Coles, the director of student service at Florida State, knows Rathan-Mayes has taken a liking to the students.

"Xavier has really grown fond of the students at Oak Ridge Elementary, and the students really enjoy his presence," said Coles.

Good is never good enough for the Florida State Seminoles, and that philosophy is embraced on and off the court. There is another way the Seminole men's basketball team can be active in the community and give back to the people who give so much of themselves to all of the sports programs at Florida State.

"I think we always have to find ways to try to better our community, our society and to the young people coming behind us," Jones said.

Moving forward, Rathan-Mayes and Jones would like to see more involvement in the program from the Florida State community.

"I'd like to see more emphasis be out there in the public eye and more people realizing this is a great cause to get behind," Jones said.

Florida State fans and the members of the loyal Tallahassee community can easily become involved by donating books or coming to games when the Coaching for Literacy program is promoted.

"Florida State and Coach Stan Jones set an incredible example for their involvement in the Fight for Literacy," said Ryan Viner, executive director of Coaching for Literacy.