

Lion tackles importance of black role models

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Detroit Lions All-pro football player Lomas Brown wants to practice what he preaches.

So he's renewing efforts to get the final three credits needed to complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree in public education from his alma mater, the University of Florida.

Education was a key topic last Thursday when Brown appeared at the Auburn Hills Campus of Oakland Community College as part of Black History Month. The campus Association for Black Students scheduled Brown to talk about the need for black male role models.

Brown emphasized the need for self-reliance. "We can't rely on the president or any one person or program" for economic independence, he told a packed lunch time audience.

To be successful, blacks must rid themselves of self-doubts and rely on their own skills, work ethic and education, Brown said. "Education will carry you a lot further than your body."

During the question and answer session, Brown acknowledged he intends to follow his own advice.

Brown said he was several credits short of a degree when he was drafted by the Lions in 1985. But he continued taking classes and obtaining college credits, through a program designed by the National Football League to help players graduate.

He's earned several credits that way, Brown said, but the final three credits must be earned through the University of Florida, which would grant the degree.

And he won't feel complete until he gets the degree, Brown said, even though his status and salary as a professional athlete will likely provide a secure future. "Until I do that (complete the degree) I won't feel comfortable talking about the importance of an education," he said.

■ 'It's time we quit using those terms (racial slurs even as jokes in the locker room) and started respecting each other.'

Lomas Brown

Other topics Brown touched upon during his 60-minute talk included:

■ The work ethic. "A lot of my teammates (in college) had more talent than I did," Brown said. But they aren't playing professional football — and enjoying the life it provides — because they didn't focus their efforts. Some were sidetracked by drugs, he said.

■ The status of professional athletes. Fans and the media put sports figures on a pedestal. Most athletes don't want that, Brown said, and many don't deserve it.

■ Marge Schott, owner of the Cincinnati Reds Baseball Team, who was disciplined for using racial slurs. "I don't know what her background is," Brown said after his talk. "But her punishment should have included some community service in the inner city to increase her sensitivity."

Schott was suspended from baseball for one year and fined \$25,000.

■ Professional players using racial slurs. Players contribute to misunderstanding by using those terms, often joking, in the locker room and on the field, Brown said. "It's time we quit using those terms and started respecting each other."

Among those who heard Brown's talk was a class of youngsters from the Whitmer Human Resource Center in Pontiac. One of the students, Robert Powell, seemed to summarize their reaction when he said, "I liked what he said. He knows what life is all about."

Brown and his wife, Delores, live in Rochester Hills. They have three daughters.

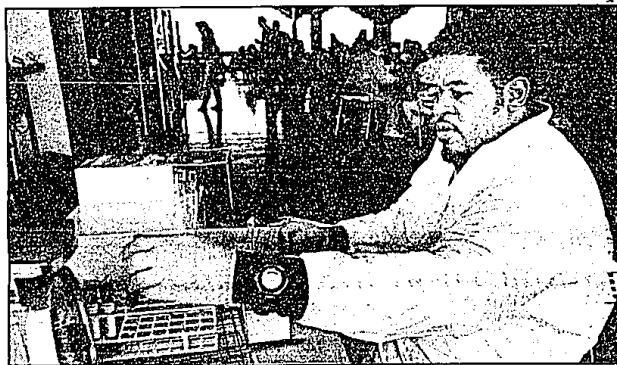


STAFF PHOTOS BY DAN DEAN

Up close and personal: Candy DeTroyer chats with Lomas Brown as the Detroit Lions football star signs autographs after his talk on the OCC campus.



Just do it: Lois Harris (above) and Ronald Brezzell (right) of the American Red Cross don't think of themselves as role models, but agree with Brown that anyone who is good at what they do can be a role model.



...and here they are

Lomas Brown wasn't the only black role model on hand last week at the Auburn Hills campus of Oakland Community College.

While Brown, a 300-pound tackle with the Detroit Lions, was in the cafeteria talking about the need for black role models, Lois Harris and Ronald Brezzell were in the next room doing the job. Harris, a nurse from Orion Township, and Brezzell, a truck driver and medical assistant, were part of a team from the American Red Cross that collected 36 pints of blood.

Harris and Brezzell said they agree with Brown's message that youngsters — black or white — need adults they can emulate.

"But role models don't have to be professional athletes or entertainers," said Harris. "A role model can be someone with good qualities that inspire us."

"Sports figures can be role models. But so can nurses, accountants or anyone who contributes in the personal or professional lives. Good fathers or mothers are excellent role models."

Brezzell said he recognizes the need for role models, although he doesn't consider himself to be one. "I'm just a man who goes to work every day to provide for my family," he said.

A graduate of Central High School in Detroit, Brezzell's job includes testing and processing blood.

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