

# Laying the ground work: Coach focuses on academics over athletics

BY CHANEL DAVIS  
THE CHRONICLE

Roderick Fluellen is busy focusing on the student part of the city's student-athletes. The former Winston-Salem State University football player has founded a mentor group that would offer student-athletes a place to cast their worries and focus on what's important: being a student before making the plays.

True Elite, is a nonprofit, agency that provides mentoring, tutoring and preparation for higher education. The agency's goal is to provide positive relationships, in the form of mentors, for student athletes that promotes pro-social relationships, community involvement, self-sufficient skills and the understanding of the importance of education. Its website said that it believes that this will enhance the chances of their athletes becoming productive citizens.

Fluellen, a football and baseball coach at Northwest Middle and Carver High schools, said that he tried to do everything to help his players.

"As an athlete, I found myself getting stressed and overwhelmed due to classroom expectations," Fluellen said. "As I was coaching and talking to the players, I noticed that they were feeling the same way I once felt. I found a plethora of

research that indicates that student athletes are more stressed, overwhelmed and are becoming depressed due to high demands. In worst cases, students are committing suicide due to not being able to find that balance."

So he created True Elite.

Along with Fluellen, other board members include E. Tyron Scott, Gregory Wilson, Tanya Purdie and Jamaine Mack, all former athletes.

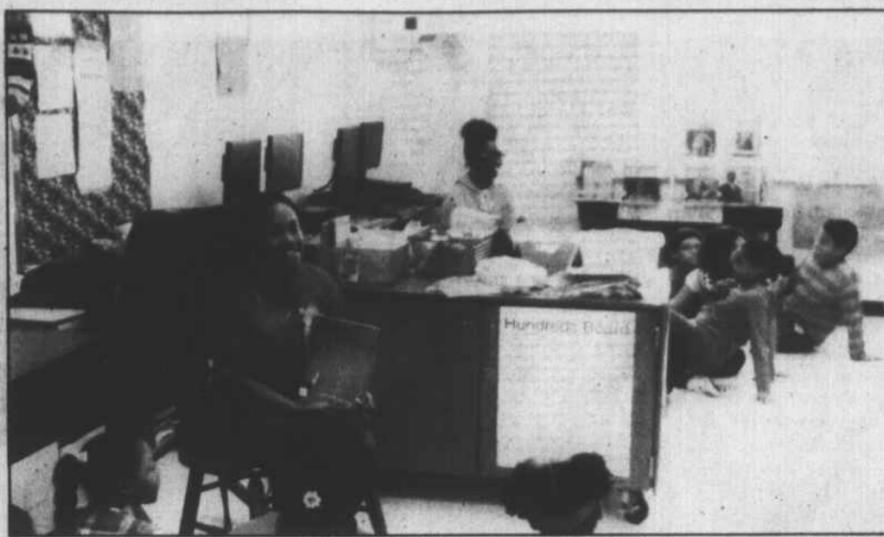
The organization targets middle and high school athletes in the Winston-Salem area and wants to help them find a balance that allows them to be successful on and off the field.

The program is open to students ages 13 to 18 years old. Students would be required to show up for an hour of tutoring before going to practice. During that time, students are expected to do homework or study subjects in which they have low grades or need assistance in per the students' report cards and progress reports.

Participants are required to maintain a minimum grade point average of 3.0, graduate with their class, meet all qualifications to ensure graduation and receive the proper online sports-related exposure.

"Even if they have good grades, I still try to make them understand so they can do peer tutoring," he said.

Fluellen said that he has gotten good feedback from the students, teachers and



Students who participated in True Elite went into elementary classrooms and read to students as part of Read Across America day.



True Elite participants have activities such as reading to elementary students.

the parents of Northwest and Carver.

"I've been receiving a lot of positive feedback," he said. "My goal is to do a pilot program to open it up to other students. It's a lot of students who don't have a great support system and fall between the cracks. They can't keep their grades up, can't play and then stop coming to school."

Jalin Richardson said that he loves the program.

"It helps me in class and it also helps me become a better person. He's a great mentor and it's a great academic program to have for our athletes. Especially those who need a lot of help in class," he said.

The 17-year-old said he would use the skills he

learned from True Elite when he begins at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

"This helps me to get higher test scores and to become more of an independent thinker," Richardson said. "In college, it will help me become a better student. If you don't have the resources at the time, if you've already been trained and tutored, then you should already know what you're doing."

Fluellen said that the program would also include community service projects including Read Across America, raising money for children who need sports supplies, school supplies and sponsoring families during the holiday season.

"Other children are looking up to them who want to play high school sports," he said. "They're role models."

Most importantly he hopes the program gives athletes a future.

"We preach that it's called student-athlete for a reason. Student comes before athlete so before you can be an athlete you need to be a student," he said. "We want them to be able to have all the qualifications needed to get accepted for higher education."

For more information on the True Elite program, visit [www.trueelite-ws.com](http://www.trueelite-ws.com).

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