

Winston-Salem Prep planning its football future

BY LAYLA FARMER
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For years, Winston-Salem Preparatory Academy has been lauded for its academic achievements. The school, which is predominantly black, offers only courses at the honors level or higher and has boasted the highest graduation rate in the county for three years running.

Now, the school, which is home to students in grades 6-12, is hoping for similar success on the football field. The school recently received approval from the Board of Education to launch a football program. Athletic Director Ricky Holt believes the program will complement the school's academic rigor.

"Athletics is really not the major focus at Winston-Salem Prep; the major focus is academics and that'll never change," he stated. "... I think we have an opportuni-

ty to do something special in that our focus is not necessarily on the winning; it's more on developing the student athlete."

The school already has an established athletics program, which includes track and field, basketball and volleyball, and has turned out some successful athletes, but the students have been asking school leaders for some time to create a football program, Holt said.

"What we did was poll all the students, including middle school students, and overwhelmingly, football was their first choice," Holt said. "If your kids want something, you want to try to get it for them because a lot of good things are going to spring from football."

Incoming PTA President Shonta Fleming says the addition of a football would help increase students' exposure to positive role models and encourage increased physical activity. She



Keyla Fleming (center) is flanked by her mother Shonta (right) and PTA member Dolores Hill.

believes a football program would also help attract more students to the school.

"The mission is definitely to keep kids in school, especially males, and give them something positive to do. It makes the whole program (offered at W-S Prep) more appealing," related Fleming, a substance abuse counselor. "I think it'll help bring parents in the door and more students in the door. I think we lose a lot of kids because we don't have a football team."

Holt met with a handful

of football supporters Monday evening to plan for what will likely be a very busy fundraising season for the school. Holt, a former football player, says it will take \$35,000 to get the program off the ground and keep it afloat in its inaugural season. The money must be in place by June 30 in order for the team launch in the 2011-2012 school year.

"I really believe it's going to happen," Holt told supporters at the meeting. "Will it happen by June 30? I'm not quite sure, but I'm



Holt

pretty sure that it's going to happen because there are a lot of people that are very interested in Winston-Salem Prep."

Among those in attendance was Sylvia Lash, who has two grandchildren at the school. She suggested a number of fundraising ideas to school officials. Lash has a personal interest in the program: Her grandson, a rising freshman, insists upon it.

"I want him to stay here (at WSPA) and he will stay, contingent on the fact that we get a football team," she related. "We need \$35,000, so you've got to look at it from all angles. These boys

want to play football come fall so we've got to get it."

Fleming's daughter, Keyla, is a rising freshman and a three-sport athlete at Winston-Salem Prep. The 14 year-old says being involved in sports has enhanced her educational experience.

"It basically keeps me on track and it keeps me focused, so I won't be bored and have nothing to do," she said.

Keyla, a cheerleader and member of the volleyball and track teams, says the prospect of having a football team is exciting.

"Many people have been wanting a football team and many people have been waiting for one," said the aspiring pediatrician. "It'll make Prep a better school and give it a better name."

Winston-Salem Preparatory Academy will hold a fish fry to raise funds for the football program on Saturday, May 28 from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. Location TBD. For more information, contact the school at (336) 703-6732.

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