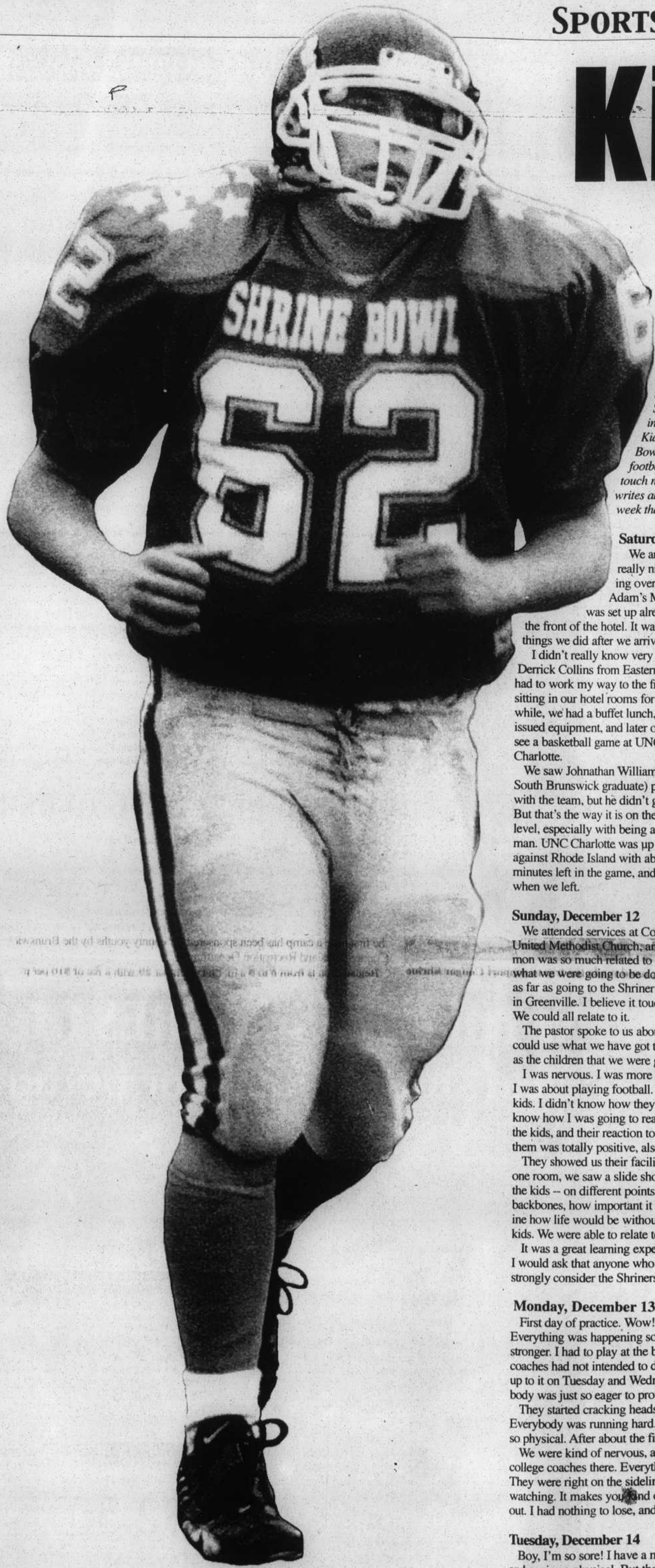


SPORTS

Kidd's play

South Brunswick linebacker touched by 'Bowl' experience



South Brunswick senior linebacker Wes Kidd was selected to the 63rd annual Shrine Bowl North Carolina football squad and spent last week practicing with the team to prepare for Saturday's big event -- the game played in Charlotte's Memorial Stadium. But as Kidd found out, being selected to the Shrine Bowl team means more than just playing a football game. It is a week-long event that can touch many lives both on and off the field. Kidd writes about his once-in-a-lifetime experience, a week that he won't ever forget.

Saturday, December 11

We arrived at the hotel to check in. It was a really nice hotel. It was huge. As we were coming over on Highway 74 you could see the big Adam's Mark. When we got there, everything was set up already. It was really organized, set up at the front of the hotel. It was a really nice place. One of the first things we did after we arrived was to get our physicals.

I didn't really know very many people. I just met my roommate, Derrick Collins from Eastern Randolph, who is a linebacker, too. I had to work my way to the front of the line for physicals. After just sitting in our hotel rooms for a little while, we had a buffet lunch, was issued equipment, and later on got to see a basketball game at UNC Charlotte.

We saw Johnathan Williams (1999 South Brunswick graduate) practicing with the team, but he didn't get to play. But that's the way it is on the collegiate level, especially with being a true freshman. UNC Charlotte was up by 18 against Rhode Island with about three minutes left in the game, and that's when we left.

Sunday, December 12

We attended services at Covenant United Methodist Church, and the sermon was so much related to us and what we were going to be doing today as far as going to the Shriner's Hospital in Greenville. I believe it touched us all. We could all relate to it.

The pastor spoke to us about what our gift was in life and how we could use what we have got to affect the lives of many people such as the children that we were going to be seeing at the hospital.

I was nervous. I was more nervous about going to the hospital than I was about playing football. I had no idea what to expect with the kids. I didn't know how they were going to react to me. I didn't know how I was going to react to them. When I got in there and saw the kids, and their reaction to me was just so positive. My reaction to them was totally positive, also.

They showed us their facilities, what kind of patients they treat. In one room, we saw a slide show and a man there related football to the kids -- on different points. He demonstrated how we need our backbones, how important it is in hitting. Then he asked us to imagine how life would be without a straight backbone, as it is for some kids. We were able to relate to that.

It was a great learning experience. I am so thankful for what I have. I would ask that anyone who wants to donate to charity to please strongly consider the Shriners. Their cause just touched my heart.

Monday, December 13

First day of practice. Wow! It was so physical. It was rough. Everything was happening so fast. They were all bigger, faster and stronger. I had to play at the best of my level just to compete. The coaches had not intended to do any hard hitting today but just work up to it on Tuesday and Wednesday. We came all out. I guess everybody was just so eager to prove what they've got.

They started cracking heads. It was all-out contact every time. Everybody was running hard. Everybody was hitting hard. It was just so physical. After about the first practice, I had a major headache.

We were kind of nervous, all of us, because there were so many college coaches there. Everything we did, we were being watched. They were right on the sidelines, with their uniforms and hats, just watching. It makes you kind of nervous. But I just tried to block it out. I had nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

Tuesday, December 14

Boy, I'm so sore! I have a major headache. Practice was so hard, and again so physical. But the food was excellent. I have not had any contact for about five or six weeks. I'm not sure of the exact date.

But all of that contact today was worse than any game that I played in this whole season.

It was all collision, contact. Everyone was sore. I think the people who hadn't hit in a while were taking the worse of the beatings. It is rough, but I wouldn't give it up for the world.

Wednesday, December 15

I decided to skip breakfast so I could get more sleep. Possibly, my muscles can heal a little longer. When lunch time came around, I was really hungry. It was worth it to get some extra hours of sleep. But lunch was horrible. We ate at the school cafeteria and had sub sandwiches and soup.

After practice, we went to see the Charlotte Hornets play the Minnesota Timberwolves. We had horrible nose-bleed section seats, but we sort of worked our way down there. By the time it was over, some of the guys had pretty much courtside seats. They told me to shake hands with the players. We got some pretty good seats after a while, but starting out we didn't have good seats. I worked my way down that low, no doubt. I wasn't going to sit up there and watch the little shadows.

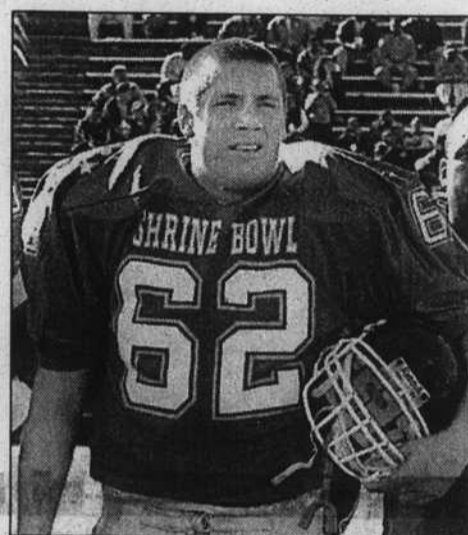
Thursday, December 16

We had the chance to go to the Concord Mills mall. They have some nice shops there, Old Navy, and stuff like that, places that I don't get to go to around Wilmington. It was pretty nice. We got some Christmas shopping done.

It gave us a little more time for the players to bond with one another. There are a lot of players here, and we all have pretty much the same interests with football. It's easier to relate with the players on girls and issues like that, anything that we want to discuss.

Among the linebackers, there are four of us. We get along very well. Mainly we are hanging out with the people that we have the most interest with.

I got to spend a lot of time with D. Force (Shrine Bowl team manager and South Brunswick fellow teammate). It is good to have a friend up here. If I need someone to talk to, he is always there. Or if I need some advice, I can't really ask anybody else because I'm not close enough to anyone else. That's really nice to have. I think it's the same for him.



No. 62: South Brunswick senior Wes Kidd

Friday, December 17

As soon as practice was over, we were all excited. We didn't have anymore practices to worry about. Then we took off to Lowe's Motor Speedway. It was really fun. We got to take laps around the track. They had some pace cars and some vans. They got up to some high speeds, maybe 95 to 100 mph, nothing crazy. It was fun because it was angled off in the corners. It was a good experience for all of us, I believe. I rode in a minivan. I was kind of worried that it was going to tilt, but that was okay. It was still fun.

At the banquet, we had Lou Holtz of South Carolina as our guest speaker. He is a very motivational speaker. He did a magic trick for us, and I was just amazed. I wasn't paying attention while he was doing it, to his hands or anything, but I was sitting there amazed at how he did it. He talked about having dreams, how everyone has got to have a dream. As long as you have a dream, you'll have something to work for. It was a very motivational speech.

I've been missing home all week, missing my friends. I was missing not being at home and being on a tight schedule. On the schedule, everything is set, fifteen minutes here and there. I was so glad to see the South Brunswick cheerleaders. When they arrived at about 8:30 or 9 p.m. after the banquet got through, I was headed back to the room and I saw them. I was so glad to see some people from back home. If I couldn't go home, it was nice that home came to me.

Saturday, December 18

After a week of practice, I was kind of nervous about playing the game. I knew that I was going to go out there with the attitude that I was going to play as hard as I can every chance I get. I started off mainly on special teams through three quarters. I finally got a chance to play in the fourth quarter, and it was a blast.

I think I did the best that I could. Whether I made a good showing, that's up to the coaches out there watching everything. But personally, I played on a high level.

My advice to anyone is, if they ever consider giving a donation to give it to the Shriners. If they could just take a look at that hospital, look at all of those kids, and know that everything for those kids is paid for. It's just amazing. I think everybody ought to try to donate to the Shriners at some point in their lifetime.

Team manager D. Force 'It's something that I'll never forget'

When asked to describe his most memorable moment of the Shrine Bowl, South Brunswick senior D. Force talks not of his own experience but instead recalls the play of his former teammate Wes Kidd.

"It was when Wes got put into the game in the fourth quarter and made that big hit which caused the quarterback to fumble," said Force, who served as team manager of the North Carolina squad this past week.

D. Force talks with Wes Kidd on the sidelines of the Shrine Bowl game.

Photos by Terry Pope

Force says his position as a manager, and not as a player, allowed him to strike up conversations on the sidelines with college coaches he admires -- Lou Holtz, Dan Brooks, Bobby Bowden.

"It was an exciting week," said Force. "I've never seen so many good players on the same field. Just the speed that is there shows what kills us in our conference, not just the talent. The linemen have so much speed and strength. When I was going, I didn't know what to expect."

It was Force's job to keep equipment in check and to make sure players were up in time for practice each morning. The trip to the Shriner's Hospital in Greenville on

Sunday was one experience he still can't get out of his mind. The Shrine Bowl game benefits the Shriners' hospitals for crippled children and burn victims.

"It was so touching," said Force. "They told you of how the Shriners have to work together, just like a football team. It made you realize how lucky you are to just be able to walk. They showed us how the surgeries are performed. It made you think."

"The players signed autographs for the kids in the hospital. A lot of us had the kids to sign our shirts, too. The way the kids' faces lit up when we walked into the rooms was amazing. It's something that I'll never forget."

