

THE TICKER: LIONS' SMITH HELPS ALMA MATER CENTRAL'S STUDENTS

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As Lions safety Dwight Smith stood behind a mountain of backpacks Tuesday in the cafeteria at Detroit Central High, a school staff member implored several hundred students over the public address system.

"All right, people," she said. "We need you to quiet down and form one line."

Tough sell for a bunch of kids on the first day of school. It was deafening as students queued up and approached Smith, a 1997 alumnus who stood ready with a handshake, a quick comment and an easy smile.

Through his foundation, Smith handed out 600 backpacks that featured the Lions' color scheme and contained school supplies. After senior Austin Monroe took one, Smith offered an observation.

"He said I don't look happy that the school year's back," said Monroe, who was not sure who Smith was.

"Football player?" he guessed.

Smith, 30, grabbed the microphone and the cafeteria fell silent. Smith preached the importance of school. He also emphasized the need for finding a mentor the way he had in late Central football coach Woody Thomas and current coach Eric Smith, his defensive coach for four years.

"I want all y'all to understand there's going to be a teacher or a counselor or a coach or somebody you come in contact with that will be able to mold you, to guide you," Smith said. "They might not always tell you what you want to hear, but most of the time, it's what you need to hear."

Smith, who came to the Lions as a free agent in February, was not always the best listener. But football changed that quickly.

"His freshman year, he was the local knucklehead," Eric Smith said. "After he reached out for us, we reached out for him. And once he saw the fame he could get out of football, we had no more problems with that guy."

As a freshman, Dwight Smith said he couldn't have imagined starting his own foundation and being a role model. Now he can't imagine anything but that.

"My granddad always told me the measure of a man is what you can do for others," he said. "Being back at home, I felt like it was something I had to do. It wasn't even a second thought about it."

By Carlos Monarrez

The Rudi factor

In honor of new Lion Rudi Johnson, our favorite Rudys:

*Let's get the obvious one out of the way first: Rudy, the pesky put-me-in-coach guy from Notre Dame.

*Rudy Giuliani.

*Rudy Galindo.

*Rudy T.

*Joe Rudi.

*Rudy York.

*"Rudy," by Supertramp. Or was it by Rudy Vallee?

*That cute little Rudy from "The Cosby Show."

And baby makes ...

*Four! Tiger and Elin Woods are expecting a sibling for daughter Sam, his Web site announced, in late winter.

The Ticker is compiled from staff reports and news services by STEVE SCHRADER, who can be reached at 313-222-6710 or sschrader@freepress.com.

MEMO: MORNING LINE

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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