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# Redskins past and present remind youngsters of importance of education

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VIRGINIA BEACH — Ross Tucker wasn't the most recognizable face on the dais Friday afternoon at the Washington Redskins' "4th and Life" presentation to about 200 high school football players. But the hulking offensive lineman had the smoothest delivery.

Tucker, 28, sat alongside teammates Rocky McIntosh and Ade Jimoh, former Redskins star Dexter Manley, special teams coach Danny Smith and vice president of football operations Vinny Cerrato. Each addressed the assembled players and coaches from various Beach District schools.

The others had more cachet than Tucker, who has labored in anonymity during a five-season NFL career with five different teams. But when the 6-foot-4, 310-pound Pennsylvania native stood and spoke, he had no trouble capturing the audience's attention.

"A lot of people who are 30 or 40 can't say they are the best they can be at the one thing in life they love the most," said Tucker, who has succeeded despite not being drafted. "But I can say that, and I hope each of you can one day say the same."

The presentation came at the second annual Redskins Beach Blitz at the Virginia Beach Convention Center. It aimed to make the students aware of the discipline, planning and commitment needed to make it in professional football — or any other career.

Event literature pointed out that only 0.2 percent of U.S. high school players ever reach the NFL and that the length of the average NFL career is



Dexter Manley joined current Washington players and coaches at Friday's "4th and Life" presentation.

only 3.3 years.

Tucker made his point with several anecdotes, including one from eighth grade.

Tucker's older sister had friends over, including some football players who lamented that they wouldn't be able to play the game competitively in the future at the college of their choice.

"I was about 5-foot-6 and a chubby 150 pounds listening to these big, tough guys talk about how they wished they'd worked harder," Tucker said. "They had a lot of regret and they couldn't go back and change what they hadn't done."

"That's when I changed my life. I became the best I could be at football and in school. The best guys I've played with in the NFL are also the smartest and that's not a coincidence."

Manley, appearing immense behind the podium, gave a passionate if somewhat disjointed soliloquy.

"I worked all my life to get out of the ghetto and I wound up back there," thundered Manley, whose career and life were undone by substance abuse. "I've lost \$17 million, but I haven't lost my desire to live."

Smith told of how, as a high school quarterback, he was kicked off the team for a year and watched his friends through a fence while he "cried like a baby."

"It was the worst year of my life," the former William

## LUCKY WINNERS

Three local youth groups will be honored with cash prizes at 3:30 p.m. today during the Redskins Beach Blitz tailgate party at the 31st Street Oceanfront park. The awards were made by the Washington Redskins Charitable Foundation and the Fannie Mac Foundation as part of \$100,000 dispersed in the 2006 Redskins All-Stars competition. The winners:

► Community Services YMCA of South Hampton Roads (Norfolk, \$2,500): YMCA Healthy Kids Day 2006 at Campostella Elementary School is a national YMCA event focusing on improving the health and well-being of youth. The goal of the community service project is to celebrate healthy and active lifestyles, help kids make healthy choices and introduce a broad range of family-friendly programs found at YMCAs and in the community.

► Alternatives, Inc. (Hampton, \$2,500): The Kids Involved in Community Kindness program at Y. H. Thomas Community Center of Hampton began last March. Youths put together a presentation for the Y. H. Thomas Adult Board of Directors and convinced the board to back a project to improve the basketball court.

► Hampton Roads Community Care (Virginia Beach, \$1,000): The youths completed a makeover of J. J. Roberts Elementary School, a Title I, low-income school in Norfolk. The project resulted in 75 new lights, two dumpsters filled with trash and debris, two new playgrounds and one new swing set.

— Jim Ducibella

and Mary assistant said. "But I learned I wasn't bigger than the team."

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