

Strong Family Fuels Athletic, Academic Success

For Teen Starting College on Full Scholarship

As students across Charlotte return to school this month, CHA resident Jamal Watson will be starting his freshman year at Towson University in Towson, Maryland (outside of Baltimore).

One of the nation's premier regional public universities, Towson University first heard about Jamal's athletic prowess, while playing as cornerback for the Myers Park Mustang for four years, and they came calling. Would he be interested in playing football for Towson University? They later learned that not only was he a great athlete, but that he was an excellent student, as well.

Jamal had several recruiters and head coaches checking out his talent, but he was not your average football player. He did his homework, and visited several college campuses, and selected Towson University as the place that offered him the best opportunity to pursue both his academic and his athletic interests and he signed with Towson.

Jamal's mother, Kameela Watson, signed him up to play Mighty Mites Football when he was five years old just to keep him busy. He wasn't sure he liked it that first year. But he made friends, and his mom kept signing him up, so he kept playing.

By the time he was eight, he was winning trophies in Little League and knew football was a game he was born to play. The workouts and the practices actually felt like fun.

While he was playing football, his mom was working hard to pay the bills, and get her son to his practices and her daughter to cheerleading and dance practice.

Today, Ms. Watson is a Donor Recruiter with the American Red Cross and is a graduate of Brookstone College of Business and looks forward to owning her own home one day.

Jamal's sister Tyana is also one to watch. As an honor roll student on the Step Team. She is also planning on going to college, and hopes to be a cheerleader in middle school this fall. She is very proud of her brother and looks forward to watching him play college football.

Ms. Watson says she has had challenges to overcome in her life but she and her children have built a strong family.

"My mom always believed in me," says Jamal. "She kept me in football when I was young to keep me out of trouble." And it worked. "She kept me going until I started liking it, then I kept myself going."

Jamal says he views football as his job. Getting up at 6 a.m. for the practices every day in the summer is just part of the job.

Jamal leaves for Towson University this summer for football practice and summer school, where he will take his first two classes. He plans to major in Business Administration or Project Management.

Between the football scholarship from Towson and the scholarship from the Charlotte Housing Authority Scholarship Fund, all of Jamal's college expenses are covered for all four years

Ms. Watson says she will shed "happy tears" when her son leaves for college. She says now is his time to develop into a young man. She hopes he will "stay in his own lane" and avoid the peer pressure that will come from being in college.

Jamal says he takes with him strong family support from his mother, his sister, his father & his "praying great-grandmother." He says he has a strong faith in God, and is excited about this new chapter in his life.