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Lofty praise for Jamaican youngsters

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Adrain Frater photo

Shaun Smith, of the Cleveland Browns, explains a training drill to one of the youngsters who participated in the RuJohn camp in Montego Bay on Thursday. Smith was full of praise for the athleticism of the young Jamaicans.

Adrian Frater, News Editor

WESTERN BUREAU:

THE AMERICAN athletes who participated in last week's RuJohn NBA/NFL Celebrity Sports Camp have described the athleticism, attitude, enthusiasm and discipline of the children they have worked with as "unbelievable".

Speaking at a ceremony at Breezes hotel in Montego Bay on Thursday night, NFL star Omar Gaither of the Philadelphia Eagles said he was completely taken aback by the energy and interest shown by the more than 500 youngsters who participated in the one-day camps which were staged in Kingston, Negril and Montego Bay.

"I was pleasantly surprised and impressed by athleticism, attitude, enthusiasm and discipline," said Gaither. "If given the opportunity and the right conditions to succeed, I believe a lot of these youngsters could become NBA and NFL stars," he said.

Shaun Smith, of the Cleveland Browns, whose burly size made him an instant attraction with the children, said the enthusiasm he saw in the children reminded him of his own childhood days. He too predicted that given the right circumstances, a number of the children he worked with could become NBA and NFL players.

Natural athletes

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"These kids are dynamic and the fact that they are natural athletes makes them easy to work with," said Smith. "I am really looking forward to coming back and working with these kids."

The RuJohn outfit is a non-profit organisation based in south Florida which promotes a myriad of activities aimed at promoting academic achievement through sportsmanship and creating opportunities for talented young sportsmen and women.

"This event is about merging celebrity and community in an attempt to encourage solid citizenship amongst Jamaica's youth," said Andrew Bachelor, who founded the organisation with his sister, Christina, to commemorate the philanthropic ideals of their grandparents, Ruth and John Tulloch.

"The idea is to have professional athletes from the NFL and NBA sharing their experiences and talent with Jamaican players," said Bachelor.

During the ceremony, which was done jointly by SuperClubs and several local sponsors, the RuJohn Foundation made presentations of educational material to Sheffield Basic School, Mount Ward Primary School and the St. James Infirmary.

The athletes involved in this year's RuJohn camp included NBA players Tim James of the New York Knicks, Delonte West of the Boston Celtics and Andray Blatche of the Washington Wizards and NFL players Touraj (T.J.) Houshmandzadeh of the Cincinnati Bengals, Gaither, Rudi Johnson of the Bengals and Smith.

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