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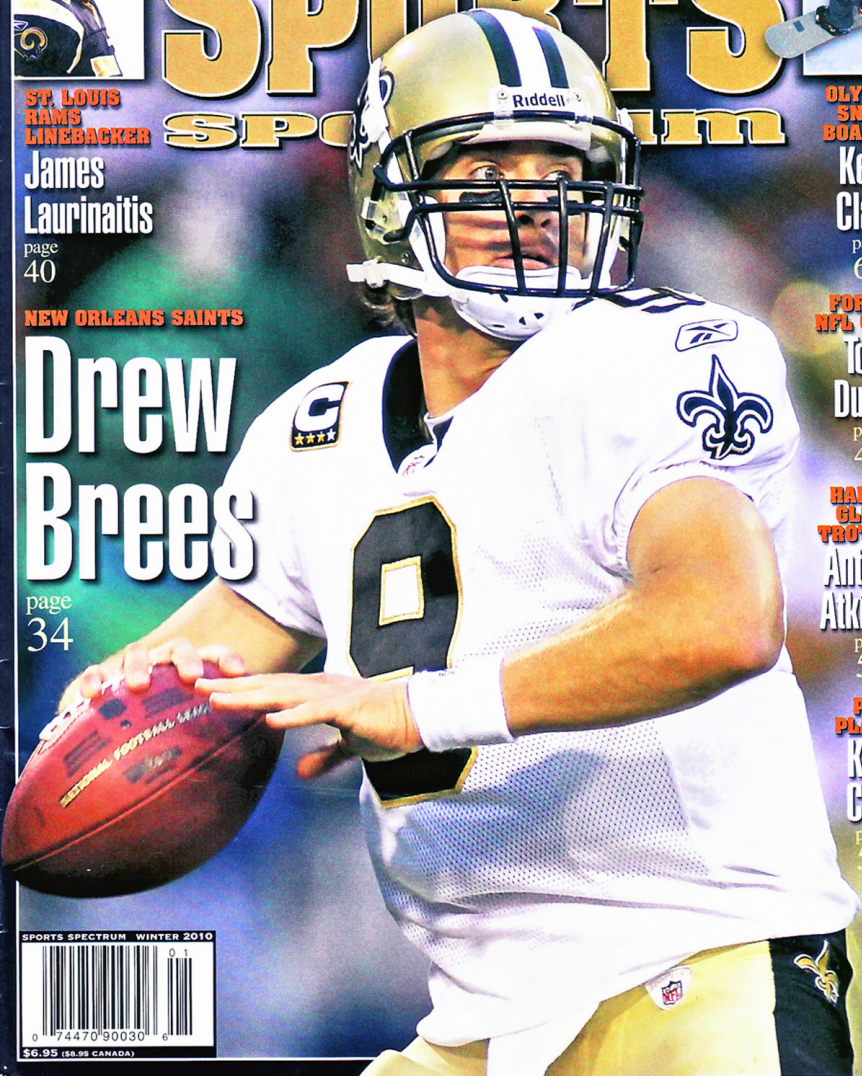
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SPORTS SPECTRUM WINTER 2010



\$6.95 (SR.95 CANADA)

CHECKING OUT ATHLETES OFF THE FIELD OF PLAY • BY JENNA SAMPSON

NFL players making a spiritual impact through their foundations

■ **My favorite current and former NFL players** this year are a group of guys who have perfected the art of giving. Whether it's giving the nastiest hit of the day, or giving the crowd a catch to remember, these guys are big givers in every way—and not just on the field. **Ryan Nece, Shelton Quarles, Earnest Graham and Mike Furrey** have taken the concept of giving to a whole different level off the field as well.

RYAN NECE

NFL veteran,
Tampa Bay Buccaneers

"The Power of Giving"

(launched 2009)



▲ **Making children happy:** Ryan Nece and Buccaneers safety Jermaine Phillips share gifts at a Good Samaritan Holiday Celebration.

■ Leading the way in lending a helping hand is NFL veteran **Ryan Nece**. Since his rookie season with the Buccaneers in 2002, when he burst into the starting lineup as an undrafted free agent, the linebacker has been making a splash in the Tampa Bay community in a variety of ways. The Ryan Nece Foundation awards annual college scholarships through its Good Samaritan Program, but that's not enough for Nece. In June 2009, he created a new charity called "The Power of Giving" in memory of two former Buccaneers teammates, Corey Smith and Marquis Cooper, who died tragically in a spring 2009 boating accident.

"Any time there's tragedy in someone's life, a lot of thoughts

go through your mind," says Nece, who most recently played for the Detroit Lions. "I was trying to raise money to grow the foundation and give scholarships in honor of those guys and do different things, but the recent economic downturn made fundraising increasingly frustrating."

Hearing a sermon about the Good Samaritan was all it took to nudge Nece into making a bold move in the spirit of giving. "I realized that in my foundation, the program is called the Good Samaritan Award, and I was going out and asking for money to make a difference. I knew I needed to start giving instead of relying on other people to make a donation."

Nece invited 70 friends of his

foundation to an event they thought they'd be paying to attend. Surprisingly, he gave each of them \$55 (his Lions jersey number) to start a chain reaction of paying it forward—officially launching "The Power of Giving."

"I gave a speech about going out in the community and making a positive impact—grow it, multiply it, or break it down and spread it out—be as creative as you want," he says. Each of those 70 people took the challenge, and many chronicled their ideas and experiences on the Power of Giving blog (ryanence.com). One car dealership was inspired to give each new car owner \$55 to Pay it Forward; a struggling painter who received \$55 from one of the attendees now puts \$55 on the back of each new painting sold, with Nece's letter explaining the program; and one creative participant even walked the streets of Tampa to feed parking meters due to expire.

"God created us to be connected to one another, and it's our responsibility to take pride in being connected in a positive way," says Nece. "We all have fingerprints, and we leave them everywhere we go. We also all have spiritual fingerprints, and we all have the opportunity to make a spiritual imprint on the people we come in contact with throughout our day."

Nece hopes to spread the Power of Giving across the country in a true grassroots style, and it's already begun. His blog includes posts from students in several states who have participated in the program. "Sometimes you'll never truly know the impact you have on others, so if seeing the result is what you're focused on, you'll be frustrated," says Nece. "Sometimes you don't get anything back when you give, but a seed can be planted and watered by someone else. Sometimes you find out down the road what your impact was."

SHELTON QUARLES

Pro Scout, Tampa
Bay Buccaneers

IMPACT Foundation

(launched 2004)

■ The Ryan Nece Foundation isn't the only foundation God is using in the Tampa Bay area to make an impact for His Kingdom. **Shelton Quarles**, who played for the Bucs from 1997-2007 (and now serves as a pro scout for the team), founded his IMPACT Foundation to provide resources and opportunities to at-risk single parent families (sheltonquarles.org).

The former linebacker's foundation was inspired by his mother, who had Quarles when she was 15 and worked two jobs to make

ends meet. "That taught me the value of hard work," he says.

Since 2004, the foundation has raised more than \$500,000 to impact the local community through events like "Mother's Day Miracles," which awards complete home makeovers for deserving single moms. "I know what it is like to not have a place to call your own," said Quarles during the 2009 makeover event.

"The Bible says, 'For everyone to



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whom much is given, of him shall much be required," he says. "I have benefited from the opportu-

nity to play professional football, and after 12 years of playing, I feel I have a lot to give back."

▼ **Remade home:** Joining Shelton and the Bernard family were Lauren Balden, caterer, and Michelle and Tom Wiebe, interior designers.



EARNEST GRAHAM Running back, Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Earnest Giving Foundation

(launched 2000)

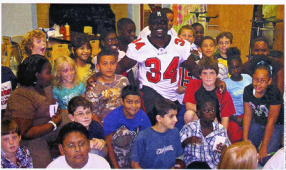
■ The aptly named "Earnest Giving Foundation" makes a difference with at-risk youth by providing mentoring and hands-on educational programs including performing arts and music production. "Today's youth don't have many outlets due to the lack of resources and the lack of organization within community," Graham says. "I believe that all human beings have an innate drive to succeed; I think

that we can provide the keys." (earnest-giving.org)

Graham himself is an amazing model of hard work and patience. After getting cut by the Bucs as a rookie in 2003, the hard-nosed running back struggled with being on and off their practice squad for a few seasons, before finally breaking into



▼ **Earnest giving:** Graham visits Heights Elementary near Ft. Myers, speaking on the importance of FCAT testing and scholastics.



the starting lineup in 2005. By the end of the 2007 season, he'd set the team single-season record for

the most consecutive games with a touchdown (six). Quite a rare comeback story for the NFL.

MIKE FURREY Wide receiver, Cleveland Browns

The Mike Furrey Foundation

(launched 2008)

■ The Cleveland Browns' Mike Furrey and his wife, Koren, started The Mike Furrey Foundation in March 2008 to help the hungry, homeless, hurting, and hopeful. Just five years prior, the wide receiver was living out of his car while trying to make the Rams squad during the summer of 2003. Since then, he's had quite a career,

Furrey was recently named National President of the "Basket of Hope" program, which is the family's favorite service project. "We go to two local hospitals once a month and deliver about 20 baskets of toys and games to kids who are



▲ **The fun of giving:** Ryan spends time going through a bag of gifts with a child at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

running routes for St. Louis, Detroit, and now Cleveland.

"My wife and I started the foundation because we believe that you should take what God has blessed you with and serve others who are in need," he says. "We try not to gain too much attention from what we do, but try to do the best we can quietly."

terminally ill or have major health problems," he explains. "We bring a separate optional tote bag with inspirational books from Tony Dunny [former coach of the Indianapolis Colts] and a prayer book." Furrey also speaks at churches, residential boys' homes, and has founded two FCA chapters (one in Detroit and one in St. Louis).

■ **Furrey and his NFL counterparts Nece, Quarles and Graham, all have something in common: humble beginnings. But hard work and dedication propelled them past unfathomable odds to reach the pinnacle of success in the NFL. They continue to make an impact for Christ both on and off the field and will all, no doubt, leave huge spiritual imprints that will last for eternity.**