

Football Players “Speak Out”  
By MICHAEL MINNICH  
WVSports.com Staff Writer

MORGANTOWN—In front of a crowd that included Athletic Director Ed Pastilong, former WVU and NFL quarterback Jeff Hostetler, and football coach Bill Stewart, six current and former Mountaineer student-athletes gave speeches on their lives and experiences in the Jerry West Lounge at the WVU Coliseum Tuesday afternoon.

It was one of the final projects for the students in Dr. Carolyn Atkins' Speech Pathology and Audiology 170 class, a course she's been teaching to student-athletes since 1990. This semester's crop included football players James Ingram, Franchot “Boogie” Allen, Noel Devine, and Justin Hostetler. The players relate life lessons to middle and high school students.

Allen related the emotional story of his childhood and youth in his speech, “Looking Forward and Not Back.”

“My ninth grade year was life-changing,” he said. Allen's family life was very stable at that point: everyone lived at home, except for his brother, who was away at college.

But then his mother was sick for ten days and refused to go to the hospital until an aunt insisted. The diagnosis: pneumonia.



“She died,” said Allen. “And we were broken up as a family.” Allen's father moved to Tennessee, while Boogie moved in with his aunt in Florida.

“I lost my way...lost my focus. My GPA dropped.”

But at the end of his junior year, Allen found his way; his brother talked to him and reminded him of his potential. It was a turning point.

“My older brother saved my life.”

His senior year, Boogie applied himself, and his football coach pointed him towards college. Although Allen didn't academically qualify, he persevered, going to Milford Academy to play and raise his SAT scores. That was where then-assistant coach Herb Hand found him and brought him to Morgantown.

“I haven't missed class once,” Allen laughed. “I can't believe it myself.”

Noel Devine's story is a similar one: the death of his mother was also a life-changing event. He related it in his speech, “Loving Today”.

Devine, one of eight children, lived with his grandmother beginning at the age of 12 following that death.

At that point: “I got into football. It was the first time in my life I had freedom and could have fun.”

Devine fulfilled his goal of making the varsity team as a freshman, and the death of a friend was an eye-opening experience.



“I realized it could happen to me,” Devine said. That was when then-NFL player Deion Sanders entered his life. Sanders, who attended the same high school as Devine, called the standout running back and school one day. Their meeting the next day at a local barbershop was the beginning of a relationship that is still strong today.

“He's my mentor. He's a father figure to me, a role model.”

Devine took extra classes to boost his grade-point average and qualified at the last minute to attend West Virginia.

“I want to get a degree and own a business...not sure what kind yet,” he said. “I would love to play football at the next level.”

Ingram's talk, titled “Where are the Goalposts?” centered on three goals that he has for his life. First, to be a good family man, like his father; second, to get a good job; and third, to be the best person he can be.

“I want to be home for my kids at least five days a week,” Ingram said. “I want to attend my children's extracurricular activities; my parents were always good about doing that for me.”

Ingram also passed on the importance of a good education and setting goals. “In life as in football, you won't go far unless you know where the goal posts are.”

Morgantown native Justin Hostetler related the stories of teammates Marc Magro and Owen Schmitt, the lesson being that hard work can get you anywhere.

Also speaking were former WVU center Brian Lewin, who returned to Morgantown after ten years playing professional basketball and will complete his degree in May, and standout freshman women's basketball player Liz Repella.

More information, including past videos, can be found at [saso.wvu.edu](http://saso.wvu.edu).

*Photos courtesy WVU Athletic Department*