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Athletes pass on advice to kids

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By **Tanya Sierra**

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

NATIONAL CITY – It's not football season, but you would never know it from all the San Diego Chargers T-shirts and jerseys donned yesterday at a National City apartment complex.

Three former Chargers football players – Mikhael Ricks, Lew Bush and Charles Dimry – played coach and motivational speaker to a squad of students from National City, Chula Vista and San Ysidro.

The event, sponsored by a social services agency that works in low-income housing projects, was an effort to raise awareness about an after-school program that is moving from the Summer Crest apartment complex.

The program provides tutoring, athletic programs, field trips and recreation for Summer Crest residents during the critical hours when students might be home alone.

After two years at the Summer Crest apartments, the program is moving to National City Middle School, where it can reach more students, said Isaac Lomeli, program coordinator with South Bay Community Services.

Summer Crest owners, **Las Palmas Housing** and its social services agency **C.A.R.E.**, are hoping to replace the program when it leaves next week with their own version, said **Madelyne Pfeiffer**, who works for C.A.R.E.

"It's all about empowerment," she said.

Las Palmas has more than 30 apartment complexes in the state. Children from its affiliates outside of National City also attended the event.

Before Las Palmas took over the complex seven years ago and added a social services component, Mayor Ron Morrison said, the apartments were troublesome for police and neighbors.

"There was a real lawless element here," Morrison said.

Some children in the complex continue to walk the line between trouble and achievement, especially those often left home alone. Adults hoped the former football players could be an inspiration.

The players talked with students, ran drills with them at a nearby school, and cooked a barbecue for participants at the end of the morning.

After an hour of throwing around footballs with children, Dimry – who played with the Chargers from 1998 to 1999 – gave sound advice.

"Whatever your dreams are, it all starts in the classroom," he said. "Compete. You don't want to just hang out. You want to be the best, and you have to compete to be the best."

Tanya Sierra: (619) 498-6631; tanya.sierra@uniontrib.com

