

FLORIDA PROGRAM

## Tutored Tallwood grad inspired to start service

By Sandra J. Pennecke  
Correspondent

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Byron Wilson cannot forget the man who mentored him. In fact, he's been inspired to help others.

A 2000 graduate of Tallwood High School, Wilson credits Bob Bobulinski and his Making a Difference Foundation for changing his life.

Bobulinski started the Virginia Beach-based nonprofit in 1990. The volunteer-driven foundation has worked with more than 59,000 students, offering tutoring, mentoring, SAT preparation, college selection assistance, English as a second language, GED, job and college application assistance and a Hispanic outreach program.

Now, Wilson is returning the favor. He and two partners established a program in Florida called FAST (Facilitated Academic and Sports Specific Training) Trak Sports Group.

Wilson's program focuses on student athletes in the seventh through 12th grades, giving them tools they need to succeed in college. Testing, tutoring and sport-specific training are all part of the program.

"I've heard so many stories and seen so many kids who are talented, but didn't go to college or amount to anything," said Wilson. "I want to help these kids understand the value of an education."

He's convinced none of this would have happened without Bobulinski.

Wilson first went to MADF to improve his SAT scores.

"They were a 930 in 10th grade and my mother felt I needed more help," said Wilson, 25, who grew up in Brigadoon and resides in Jacksonville, Fla., with his wife, Kim, and their 21-month-old son, Braylon.

Wilson played football and basketball, but made time for MADF three times a week for a year and a half.

"I was all for it," he said, "I enjoyed going, saw progress and learned a lot."

Bobulinski proudly recalls Wilson's final SAT score.

"I made a deal with him if he got a 1250 or higher, I'd take him for ribs. He got a



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1290 and ordered the king rack," he said.

That score secured Wilson's admission to Penn State. He later transferred to Virginia Commonwealth University and graduated in 2004 with a bachelor's degree in sports management and business.

Throughout college, Bobulinski was never far from Wilson's mind. Darrell Cason, a 2000 Salem High graduate, worked on a class project with Wilson their senior year at VCU to create a sports-related business plan.

"We both said, in the future if we were successful, we'd implement that plan into action," said Wilson, who is part owner of a mortgage company.

In October, Wilson, Cason and another partner, Jerrian Sanders, got on the FAST Trak.

Ron Wright of Jacksonville enrolled his son, R.J., 18, a McDonald's All-American basketball player, in Wilson's program.

"Byron has been a blessing," he said. "R.J. has seen a difference in his academic confidence level and is waiting to see which four-year university he'll attend."

And Bobulinski? He's still in the fray, committing to monthly trips to Florida to provide SAT prep classes for Wilson's FAST Trak students. "It's a labor of love," he said.

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