

Castillo helps celebrate new grounds

Ground breaking of new synthetic field in Tijuana

Friday, June 27, 2008

Chargers.com



Ground breaking of new synthetic field in Tijuana

Being a football player often comes with the typical bumps and bruises, but during Luis Castillo's past visits to Tijuana, Mexico for football camps, he's seen the locals take more than their fare share due to the playing conditions. Fortunately, hundreds of young football players south of the boarder are about to receive an opportunity to play the game in ideal settings.

On Thursday, Castillo joined Baja California Governor José Guadalupe Osuna Millán and Baja California Congressman Carlos Torres in the groundbreaking of the state-of-the-art American football facility for youth football teams in Tijuana.

Thanks to a federal grant of over \$650,000 by the CONADE (Mexico's National Sports Commission), two new turf fields are being built in Tijuana. One of will serve as a football complex for OEFA (Baja California's student football organization) at UABC (Baja California State University), and a second field at Lazaro Cardenas Federal High School.

"They have talented players in Mexico," Castillo said. "They understand football. All they need is a little bit of support. To see them build this field where the kids can play on a great surface and not worry about getting hurt, it's a great event."

Since the inception of OEFA in 1989, the popularity of American Football has grown throughout Baja California. The league is now comprised of 50 teams. Due to the increased interest in the sport and the lack of facilities, many games are currently played on dirt fields at public schools in Tijuana.

"Prior to today, there were two private fields that 30 or 40 teams were sharing," Castillo said. "This project where we give kids an opportunity to play and do what they love, it's a great opportunity for the kids of Tijuana."

The event was held at UABC where Castillo addressed more than 100 high school and college football players from the Tijuana, Rosarito and Mexicali areas. Throughout the ceremony, local officials expressed a strong desire to see a Baja California native play in the NFL in the near future. Castillo's words encouraged the young athletes to dream big and make that come to fruition.

“It’s not important where you’re from,” Castillo said as he addressed the crowd in Spanish. “It’s what’s in your heart. It’s what you set your mind to. You can achieve big things.”

While the new field will improve the quality of play in Tijuana, Mayor Jorge Ramos Hernandez also believes they serve as a way for Tijuana’s youth to become better all around people.

“Football helps develop courage, teamwork, endurance and many other life skills,” Ramos Hernandez said. “I believe football helps young athletes become better people. That’s very important to all of us.”

Castillo, who was born in the Dominican Republic and speaks fluent Spanish, has been extremely active in the Hispanic community throughout his four NFL seasons. His popularity amongst the crowd was very evident Thursday as he had a hard time taking more than two steps without being stopped to take pictures with fans or sign autographs.

“I’ve been very blessed throughout my career to be able to represent the Hispanic community in the U.S., in the Dominican Republic and in Mexico,” Castillo said. “It’s been humbling. To come down and see these people who don’t speak English but know who the Chargers and Luis Castillo are, that’s special. I truly enjoy spending time with them.”