

Dolphins Bess volunteering in Costa Rica

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Sun Sentinel

POSTED: 04:43 a.m. HST, May 31, 2011



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Miami's Davone Bess, a former Hawaii star, escaped a tackle by Pittsburgh's William Gay and scored a TD after a pass from Chad Henne on October 24.

“Respect” is one of Davone Bess’ favorite terms. He uses it for most greetings, salutations and closings.

A fitting word for someone who has worked his way up an NFL depth chart as an undrafted rookie.

Since his first days as a Dolphins long shot in 2008 Bess has labored to established himself as one of the team’s hardest workers, consistently being the first person on the practice field catching passes 15 minutes before its start, and one of the last ones off.

His work ethic motivated fellow teammate Brandon Marshall to nickname him “D-Best,” which is a play on his initials and last name, and a tribute to his grind, which led to a breakout season in 2010, in which Bess put up career-highs in receptions (79), yards (820) and touchdowns (five).

That work ethic hasn't just helped Bess gain league wide respect as one of the NFL's top slot receivers. It's motivated him to take the team's young receivers under his wing, running a grueling offseason training program for them.

It's also inspired Bess to spend the past two weeks in Costa Rica, where he's been swinging a machete chopping trees, digging 200 yards of drainage ditches, and laying tile for the people of Canitas as part of a Global Volunteers crusade.

Bess and about a dozen other volunteers have been helping the people of Canitas, a small northern town located in the Monteverde Region, prepare for the rainy season.

"I had an epiphany one night. With all I've been through on and off the field God has put me in a position to be a difference maker and to change lives," said Bess, who signed a three-year, \$9 million contract extension midway through last season.

"If I can help someone make a difference and impact someone's life I want to do that to the best of my ability."

Bess is referring to his volunteer efforts, which didn't start with Canitas, and won't stop there. He's referring to the Bess Route Foundation he started late last year with the goal of helping young people avoid some of the pitfalls that happened in his life, like his 21 month stay in a juvenile facility, which cost him his college scholarship to Oregon State before the University of Hawaii eventually gave him a second chance.

This summer Bess put together a charity basketball game to help raise funds for the struggling sports programs in his hometown of Oakland, Calif., because "I wouldn't be here without sports."

He's also spoken at schools in the community he grew up in, sharing his life story. This upcoming season his goal is to speak at a South Florida schools every week, and have the Bess Route Foundation sponsor and mentor college-bound students.

"If I inspire one life that's enough," Bess said. "And often times these kids inspire me."

For instance, the children in Canitas, whom Bess brought soccer and football supplies courtesy of his sponsorship with Adidas, has helped him pick up more Spanish than he learned taking classes in high school, and living in South Florida the past three years. He plans to work on becoming more fluent.

The manual labor he's been doing has also helped him stay fit during the NFL's lockout.

"We've all been doing an incredible amount of physical labor, and Davone and the guys have been leading the way," said Cathy Cunningham, a Arizona native who befriended Bess on the missionary trip. "They've been chopping down trees, digging the drainage ditches and all kinds of stuff. Davone hasn't been a celebrity. He's not on vacation. He's been one of the hardest workers."

Those who know Bess can't be surprised. And they also should know this is just the beginning.

“Once I set my mind to something I go hard at it. With my story and what I've been through I'm able to give back and give kids a message about who I am and what I overcame,” Bess said. “If I can do it, you can do it too. If I can make a difference so can you.”

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