

# Dolphins WR has youth in Bess interest



By [Jason Cole](#)

POMPANO BEACH, Fla. – [Davone Bess\(notes\)](#) stares at the slide show for a few seconds and a smile crosses his face.

The [Miami Dolphins](#) wide receiver apologizes as he was distracted from an interview by the pictures on the screen. “I’m sorry,” Bess said. “I’ve never seen this ... I kind of never expected to see it.”

The look on Bess’ face is that of a young man who has learned difficult lessons about relationships. Good friends make you work and make you wait. The bad ones take you for a quick ride.



Davone Bess is in his fourth year with the Dolphins.  
(US Presswire)

Of course, the many themes of Bess’ one-hour presentation to approximately 600 students at Blanche Ely High School earlier this month is more complicated than that. But when you boil down Bess’ ideas, that’s the essence. For Bess, who kicked off the start of his “Bess Friends” mentoring program on this day, just getting here is proof that waiting is worth it.

Bess’ biography isn’t unique by NFL standards. He grew up in a single-parent home with his mother in Oakland, Calif., while his dad got caught up on the streets. He was surrounded by crime, even seeing his uncle get shot in front of his home when Bess was 10 years old. He found a future in sports, eventually getting a scholarship offer from Oregon State after working hard to get his grades in order during his final year at Skyline High.

Where it gets a little different is [right after his senior year](#). Bess can still remember it to the day. On July 9, 2003, Bess got a call from some buddies who needed a ride. When they got in the car, he didn't ask what was in the bags they were carrying. When his car got pulled over, he found out. DVDs, laptops, PlayStations ... all stolen. Bess, then 17, took the rap and did 15 months in jail when he wouldn't rat out his friends. Sadly, his "friends" wouldn't stand up for him and tell the truth.

"I just remember thinking, 'It's all gone, all the stuff I worked for, over,' " Bess said. "It's just this empty feeling."

After five months behind bars, Bess served the rest of his sentence in a youth ranch. During that time, he came up with ideas, writing down his Plan B, Plan C and Plan D. He wrote to Skyline coach John Beam. It took four tries before Beam answered back.

"He wouldn't take responsibility for his part in it and he had to know I wasn't going to answer until he did," Beam said. "As soon as he started saying the right things, I was there. But he had to say it himself. He had to learn it."

Part of learning to take responsibility came from watching so many other young men ping pong through the system, seemingly never getting the message.

"You see the same guys come in, stay two or three months and then come back again," Bess said. "There were some guys who came and went and came back again like three times while I was in there. You realize there's a couple of ways you can go and that's not the way I wanted to go."

In 2005, with Beam's help, Bess ended up getting another chance at the University of Hawaii, where he took advantage of the pass-heavy offense run by then-coach June Jones. He became one of the leading receivers in the country. Just as important, Bess met trainer Chris Kidawski, a grad student who was working with the football players.

Shortly after Bess got there, he approached Kidawski and asked for help. Like Beam, Kidawski made Bess wait.

"I didn't respond to him for probably three or four weeks," Kidawski said. "I wanted to see if he really meant it. A lot of guys come in and talk about how they want to work hard to get to the next level, but it's just talk. I'm going to help anybody I can, but they have to show the same commitment. Davone did that. He kept bugging me and bugging me to help him until I finally said, 'OK, this guy is serious.' "



Davone Bess has 12 receptions for 186 yards so far this season.  
(Getty Images)

Kidawski is the other half of Bess' slide show presentation. While Bess stands on stage, helps run through the points and answers questions in hopes of reaching somebody among the hundreds of kids, Kidawski energetically works the crowd, prodding kids to participate.

On this day, it doesn't take much. The overwhelmingly black crowd of kids easily connects with Bess. At 5-foot-10, 190 pounds and dressed in jeans, a casual shirt and some Chuck Taylor sneakers, Bess isn't physically intimidating. Even though he's one of the better up-and-coming possession receivers in the NFL (he has had more than 75 catches each of the past two seasons while playing for Miami's inconsistent offense), he doesn't look much different than a lot of the kids in the crowd.

"I guess I still kind of fool people around the league with that," said Bess, who went undrafted out of Hawaii largely because he ran only a 4.62 40-yard dash at the NFL scouting combine in 2008. "Too small, too slow ... let them keep thinking that."

What Bess has is an intuitive understanding of route running and sensational body control. In the second week of the season against the [Houston Texans](#), Bess set up a pretty 41-yard reception with some nifty footwork and then used his body to shield the ball from the defender.

Two days later, he showed off great timing at Ely High. He arrived 30 minutes prior to the presentation, making him perhaps the only athlete this reporter has ever known who showed up early on his own for a community event.

"That pretty much caught me by surprise," said Seth Levit, who runs the [Jason Taylor\(notes\) Foundation](#) and helped Bess organize the event.

During a 12-minute video about Bess, which shows where he grew up and includes Bess talking about the shooting death of his uncle, the neighborhood where he grew up doesn't look much different than where many of these kids live. Bess' neighborhood in Oakland is filled with many

of the same small, bungalow-style homes found in South Florida's poor neighborhoods, where chain-link fences and bars on the windows are standard.

Bess keeps the message simple and adds in enough self-deprecation so that he's not just some star athlete talking down to kids. He talks about the time someone mistook him for former Miami running back [Ricky Williams](#)(notes). Instead of getting into a snit about being misidentified and, worse, being mistaken for a guy who many think wasted so much of his career on drugs, Bess looked at the person and said thanks.

"Ricky Williams is a Heisman Trophy winner," Bess said. "That's great that you'd mistake me for someone like that."

There are seven steps in the program he talks about, using the variations on the themes of respect, perception and tolerance. Bess is also trying to recruit some of the high school kids to become mentors.

"We're here to change lives," he said. "Even if it's just one kid at a time."

Some of that message is lost from time to time as the kids scream for Bess' attention. Some kids drift in and out. No matter, Bess said. As he found out long ago, the best moments take time.