

Robert Royal uses NFL lockout down time to give back to community

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The **NFL lockout** has provided players with more free time than most have had in years.



Enlarge [Susan Poag, The Times-Picayune](#) SUSAN POAG / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE Isaiah Mason, 11 gets a low five from former NFL Green Bay Packer Santana Dotson during NFL player Robert Royal's 5th annual T.E.A. M. (Together Each Achieves More) free youth football and cheer camp at Cut Off Playground in Algiers Friday, July 1, 2011. More than 300 kids ages 7-18 participated in the camp which focused on a special initiative on childhood obesity through a partnership with Gulf Coast Social Services. Royal, is a former Edna Karr High School football standout, who played tight end at LSU and is currently with the Cleveland Browns.

[NFL pro Robert Royal Holds Camp at Cutoff Playground gallery](#)





Some have spent that time working out and recovering from injuries. Some have spent it riding bulls. And some, like New Orleans native **Robert Royal**, have spent it giving back to their communities.

Royal, a former Karr and **LSU** standout, began the **Robert Royal Foundation** and has devoted his time during the lockout to improving children's lives through the foundation's work.

On Friday, the tight end hosted the fifth annual Together Each Achieves More football camp at the Cut Off Center, where he and other NFL players, including San Diego Chargers wide receiver Buster Davis, Oakland Raiders running back Rock Cartwright and Buffalo Bills safety George Wilson, served as coaches.

"To come back and be able to give a hand back and provide an opportunity for some kids, and to be able to make a difference in their lives, is a wonderful opportunity," Royal said.

Former Green Bay Packer Santana Dotson, a New Orleans native who also coached during the camp, said Royal's devotion to giving back was something he noticed in Royal as a rookie. Dotson and Royal played together in Washington in 2002, Royal's rookie season.

"He has always been a fantastic guy that understood since his first year stepping on the scene in the NFL how important it was to give back to his respective community and the kids in the area," Dotson said.

Dotson said Royal also had an interest in the business of the NFL and worked to understand everything about that aspect of the league.

"He was a sponge," Dotson said. "He was able to receive the information. A lot of times, rookies are kind of stuck on themselves. But he understood the business of the NFL and wanted to know more about it, and that's why he's been so successful in making his choices."

That knowledge has paid off for Royal during the lockout in his work as a player representative. Royal said he frequently has conference calls with other players to inform them of the latest lockout news.

But being informed doesn't mean Royal is in control. When the Cleveland Browns released Royal on Feb. 9, he became a free agent, leaving his future in the league unclear. With teams forbidden from signing free agents during the lockout, Royal doesn't know where he will play next season.

"I try not to focus on those things," said Royal, who is 6 feet 4, 257 pounds. "I don't have any control over that. At the end of the day, all I can do is focus my time on doing things I can control, and that's helping this foundation."

Royal said he'd like to return to his hometown. The Saints might need a veteran tight end after releasing Jeremy Shockey in February.

"Obviously, being from here, I'd love to come home and hopefully play at home for one of my years," Royal said. "But that's just me doing wishful thinking. At the end of the day, I don't mind. An opportunity is an opportunity, and I'll just make the best out of it. So whichever team rings the phone, I'll try and make the best out of it."

Royal has played for three teams since the Redskins drafted him in the fifth round in 2002. He said that experience in different offenses might make him a favorable target when the lockout ends and free agency begins.

"Football is football, no matter what team you go to," Royal said. "It's just a matter of the terminology. Being a veteran actually prepares you and helps you to pick up offenses fast because you've played in numerous systems. So I actually think it's a benefit for guys like myself. Teams like guys that have been in that position before and know what it takes to win in the league."

But Royal will worry about that when the time comes. Right now, he'll continue to work with his foundation and said that's the direction he sees his future taking him, with or without football.

"As far as the free agency thing, hopefully some teams like me," Royal said. "If not, I'm fine. I've done some wonderful things. I'm going to continue to do this and that's the way I look at it."