

# Backfield in Motion gives kids better shot at success

Nonprofit helped Vandy sophomore find the right path

By Andy Humbles  
THE TENNESSEAN

Reggie Ford's childhood included being born to a 14-year-old mother, having a father who spent time incarcerated and a life without much money.

Now Ford, 19, is a sophomore at Vanderbilt University on academic scholarship and a walk-on varsity football player. Ford credits the nonprofit organization Backfield in Motion for helping him find his path in life.

"Gangs want the same kids that teachers and coaches want — (youth who are) smart, leaders and can influence people," Backfield in Motion CEO Boors Donnelly said. "We want to help kids on the edge take the right steps."

Ford was in fifth grade, or thereabouts, when he remembers being on that edge himself. He remembers being angry, and that sometimes came out in fights. Then, he found out about Backfield in Motion through friends already in the program.

He followed the steps to get into the program. Backfield in Motion serves about 150 boys, ages 10-18, from 35 Metro schools. Most are recommended for the program by educators who think the youngsters can benefit from the after-school program that tutors and conducts sports programs.

"It filled a void at a hard time in my life," said Ford, who has an improved relationship with his father. "Without it, I probably would have ended up in a not-so-good situation."

Doors were opened for Ford to attend Montgomery Bell Academy. Now he is an economics major and defensive back on the Vandy football team. He plans to someday mentor with Backfield in Motion or perhaps start a similar agency.

"Where I grew up, you don't see positive role models," Ford said. "Even if you're not the best student (Backfield in Motion) helps



Everitt Holzapel helps Micah Kimble II solve a math problem at Backfield in Motion's Saturday school at Montgomery Bell Academy. SUBMITTED

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

Season to Give stories will run in *The Tennessean* through Christmas Eve. They highlight Middle Tennessee residents who have bettered their lives thanks to help provided by local charities. The series will cover organizations throughout the region that help people who find themselves in a number of different circumstances.

## HOW TO HELP

To donate or volunteer for Backfield in Motion, call 227-9935 or visit [www.backfieldinmotion.org](http://www.backfieldinmotion.org).

you become a better young man."

## Sports 'is the hook'

Kids are picked up after school and taken to four principal locations — Rose Park Middle School, South Inglewood Community Center, Warner Elementary

and Head Middle — to study and play.

There is waiting list of more than 80 youth, and the agency is operating at the maximum number of students its buses and vans can handle.

Youngsters who can get to one of the four locations on their own participate as well. Youth with criminal records aren't admitted in most circumstances.

Sports "is the hook," Donnelly said, but the foundation of Backfield in Motion is as an academic and character-building program.

After-school sessions include one and a half hours of math and reading instruc-

tion. Each site has two Metro teachers paid to lead the tutoring sessions.

The kids then have an athletic practice or game, depending on which sports is in season. That includes football in the fall. All academic and athletic activities are free.

Each Saturday at MBA there is a required classroom session that begins with breakfast, more math and reading instruction, character development, and then the athletic activity. Backfield also runs a summer program.

## 'Second, third parent'

Katrina McClain, is a single parent whose son Corey McClain, 14, has been in Backfield in Motion for about five years.

"Before, my son, was in trouble a lot in school with behavioral things," Katrina McClain said. "I felt he needed some male figures in his life. He's matured a lot. There is so much out there they can get into, and it's good to have them in a positive program when you're a single parent." The program requires a

C average to participate in its sports activities. Competitive games usually are played at the four locations. The main office is on Woodland Street.

"We visit their teachers, counselors and principals," Donnelly, the former longtime Middle Tennessee State University football coach, said.

Trouble at school can mean suspension from sports participation with Backfield in Motion.

For students who do well, reward systems are in place, such as a trip to Memphis for boys with perfect school attendance who made their school's honor roll. They attended a Memphis Grizzlies basketball game and visited the National Civil Rights Museum.

Service projects for the youth are planned.

"Our program is very disciplined," Micah Kimble, Vice President Director of Programming, said. "Not everyone is going to want to get up at 8 in the morning on a Saturday or study after school. But we're like that second or third parent these kids need."

Backfield in Motion, founded in 2000 by Joe C. Davis, operates on a \$725,000 annual budget. It relies principally on grants but fundraisers, donors and sponsors assist.

Additional revenue would allow Backfield in Motion to serve more youth.

Donnelly would like to increase the number of academic volunteers to lower the tutor-to-student ratio in sessions. Athletic volunteers to coach also are needed.



Reggie Ford is a walk-on defensive back at Vandy.