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LOCAL FOOTBALL: Former Packer Paup conducts clinic in Amherst

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AMHERST — Jordan Kumm wasn't there just to hang out with his friends.

His participation in a three-day youth football camp last summer had nothing to do with being able to brag about attending

Kumm paid close attention to the message from former Green Bay Packers all-pro linebacker Bryce Paup to heart.

The result is a trimmer and meaner football machine, as the Amherst offensive lineman Kumm returned to the second annual Bryce Paup Youth Camp 60 pounds lighter.

"He remembered me from last year," said Kumm, who got a little one-on-one time with Paup on Wednesday during the final day of the camp. "He's definitely hands-on. He was helping me with my football stance and some areas I need to work on."

Kumm was joined by approximately 70 other aspiring young football players from central Wisconsin for the three-day camp that began Monday.

The camp was open to all third- through eighth-graders, and emphasized the fundamentals of football during two-hour sessions Monday and Tuesday.

The final day was reserved for SPARQ — Speed. Power. Agility. Reaction. Quickness. — drills more specifically targeting improving overall athleticism.

In many respects Paup, who has been conducting youth camps for three years after retiring in 2000, wanted to simulate NFL training camp conditions.

"Training camp is six weeks of doing the same things over and over again," Paup told the attendees. "You want to say, 'I don't need this,' but you do. If you don't work on the fundamentals, you won't hear cheers on Sundays."

Paup enjoyed an 11-year NFL career with the Green Bay Packers, Buffalo Bills, Jacksonville Jaguars and Minnesota Vikings.

A sixth-round draft choice of the Packers in 1990, Paup was named the NFL's Defensive Player of the Year by The Associated Press in 1995.

Those types of credentials tend to open the eyes and ears of young impressionable athletes."

"When someone like Brett Favre is talking, you definitely want to listen more," said Jared Lutz, who will be an Amherst eighth-grader in the fall. "I think Amherst really needed this because if you keep working at a young age, you'll have a good team when you get old."

The theme of the camp was "Attitude determines altitude."

Looking up in the Central Wisconsin Conference large division has been the reality for the

Amherst football program for the better part of the last 15 years.

Falcons head coach Brian Toelle is determined to change that situation and perception.

"People here are hungry to have a good football team. They're sick of getting their you know what kicked," Toelle said. "So we really want to emphasize the training part so we can get better."

Enter Paup, a close friend of Toelle when they both lived in the Green Bay area and the families attended the same church.

That connection enabled Toelle and Paup to remain friends over the years, and gave Toelle a leg up when it came to bringing his youth football camp to town.

Paup, who grew up in a tiny town of 13 people in Iowa, can relate to the small town atmosphere of Amherst.

News of the tough times the Falcons have endured in recent years also filtered back to Paup, who is hoping to provide an impetus for bigger and better things in Amherst.

"I like what Brian is trying to do here to turn things around," Paup said. "I heard the attitude has not been the greatest. That didn't happen all of a sudden. There was a progression, and you're not going to turn that around overnight. Hopefully, I can help be a catalyst in a progression to change that type of thinking."

Davis Cowden, who will be entering the fourth grade in the fall, is hoping to be part of that bright future on the gridiron in Amherst.

That is why he took three days out of his summer vacation to attend Paup's camp when he could have been playing video games.

"One of the reasons is playing football is better than video games," Cowden said. "You don't learn anything when you sit around watching television all day."

"It means a lot to have a Green Bay Packers person help us practice and get better," he added. "You learn a lot. The camp teaches you things that you would probably never know."

Another point of emphasis during the camp was for the attendees to work hard and make the most of their chance to play football.

Paup admits the adjustment to being out of the limelight of professional football and back to the so-called "real world" is a tough one.

"The worst part is your ego and trying to keep it in check," Paup said. "Your wife don't care about that. The grass has to be cut. The garbage has to be taken out. And the bills have to be paid. If you're not careful it can be very hard to find a happy medium."

Paup was happy to see Kumm back for Round 2 of his camp.

In fact, early on in the camp, Paup singled out Kumm as an example of how much good can come to someone who works hard.

And Kumm returned the compliment.

"It's great a little place like Amherst can get somebody like Bryce Paup to come here," Kumm said. "If he can make it to pro football from a small town with 19 people in his graduating class, anybody can make it if you put your mind to it."