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Colorado State University-Pueblo football player Myles Matthews (right) spends time during lunch with Pueblo Academy of Arts students Michael Artiaga (left), 14, and Arron Phelps, 14, as well as others at the school Wednesday afternoon.

EDUCATION

Football, Kansas and starfish

ThunderWolves and PAA students lunched over positive possibilities

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

It was United Way mentoring day at Pueblo Academy of Arts, but with an added bonus.

Specifically, a handsome group with smiles as broad as their should-

ers and a certain way with the pigskin.

As part of an ongoing commitment to stay engaged with the community, especially young people, Colorado State University-Pueblo's head football coach John Wristen and five of his accomplished stu-

dent-athletes visited with PAA students and their mentors Wednesday.

Over a lunch of pizza and a chicken and rice dish, the ThunderWolves, members of the middle-school family and the United Way role models exchanged talk about academics, travel,

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family, football (naturally) and, well, starfish.

"We believe in what the United Way does in our mentoring program," Wristen said. "We try to get around and see as many young students as possible.

"Talk to them a little bit and let them know these young men have been through a lot of the same situations. And if we can give them hope to get through those situations, I think we've done our job."

On this game day, the CSU-Pueblo starting lineup included David Cardinal, Tanner Draper, Miles Matthew, Zach Floyd and Orlando Mosley.

For Cardinal, there was no better way to spend the lunch hour than talking shop with a fellow running back.

"On the field, as a running back, it's always about positive yardage," Cardinal told a wide-eyed Alex Ponce, a Phoenix ball carrier. "That's what we do. And that's why training is important.

"You're gonna have to go against some pretty big guys, even at your level. The dudes on the line are bigger than you

and sometimes you're going to have to block them. So keep with the training."

Solid grid advice aside, Alex said the mere opportunity to meet an "actual college football player" was golden.

"I've never really met any college player this close up, face to face, person to person," Alex said. "So it's a real honor. And who knows? He could be going professional next year so it's really awesome to meet someone like him, a fellow running back."

At a nearby table, Lloyd, a tight end, and Haley Hernandez discovered a common bond in a neighboring state.

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“Her family is from Kansas and I’m originally from Kansas,” Lloyd said. “So it’s good to see that we can connect on that aspect.

“And I’ve enjoyed talking with her. Haley’s curious and talkative about a lot of things.”

And while totally unaware of Wristen and his immense coaching success, Obrinna Cano and Anastasia DeLuna nonetheless gifted their attentive visitor with a

blue “Make a Difference” bracelet.

Accompanied by a story about being nice to starfish.

“I told him a story about this kid walking on the beach,” Obrinna explained. “And he wanted to care for starfish. So when he saw starfish on the beach he wanted to save them so he threw them back into the ocean.”

“It’s about this bracelet,” Wristen encouraged.

“Tell them the meaning of this bracelet.”

“The little boy in the story was making a difference by throwing the starfish back in the ocean,” Obrinna added. “So he would have got a bracelet.”

“So when we see someone making a difference, we give them this bracelet,” Anastasia tossed in. “So the coach got one just for being here today.”

With, it turns out, an important life lesson to

dispense.

“I tell my players you have two ways to look at it: You can be Eeyore — ‘Winnie the Pooh,’ right? — ‘Oh, poor me. I’m going through all this. Oh boy . . .’

“Or you can be Tigger! You can be excited about going to different places and doing different things. That’s what you want to be.”

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