IT: A Redskin’s Other Playing Field

By William Burke, Information and Decision Sciences Department Faculty

Perdue School faculty member William Burke frequently keeps tabs on his past students' accomplishments. To check in with Byron Westbrook ’06, he just has to follow the Washington Redskins. Burke recently visited Westbrook and shares his recollections of this extraordinary student-athlete.

I met Washington Redskins Cornerback Byron Westbrook as he was planning on taking my course, Systems Analysis and Design, in the fall. Usually this course is taken in the last semester of a student’s senior year, but Byron planned on attending the NFL Combine in spring 2007 and wanted to stay a step ahead in his course of study.

I was familiar with Byron’s performance on the football field at SU. Being a Villanova alumnus and Philadelphia Eagles’ fan, I also knew of Byron’s older brother Brian from his days on the Villanova football team and then his career with the Eagles. Frequent pre-class chatter between Byron and me centered around his brother and the Eagle’s season and the performance of quarterback Donovan McNabb. I recall discussing with Byron the possibility of a future game where both brothers would be on the field at the same time and become one of 333 pairs of brothers who have played in the NFL.

Enough about football, how about Byron the information systems major in the Perdue School of Business? Byron was a conscientious student who focused on his class work and obtaining his B.S. in information systems. The Systems Analysis and Design class he took with me was a capstone class, bringing together the 300-level technical classes in Application Development, Database Design and Networking in order to build a functional system and prepare the students for their careers in the area of information technology. Byron planned on starting his career in the NFL and then later moving into the information technology field.

Byron demonstrated many of the same characteristics in the classroom as he does on the football field. He was a good and reliable teammate for his capstone group who worked on their capstone systems project throughout the semester. He had the knowledge of the numerous terms and definitions in the information technology field. Byron was one of my “go-to persons” in the classroom. I could always count on him to answer the questions, and I knew that he would have his assignments completed successfully and on time. Byron understood the importance of his course work and his responsibility as a student athlete.

Information systems and football may seem like an unlikely match, but when you take a closer look, you see how football has embraced technology with fantasy leagues, sports analytics and statistics. The convergence of technology and sports has surpassed other industries in regard to the speed of application, use of the Web and advanced broadcast technologies.

Recently, I had the opportunity to meet Byron at Redskins Park to catch up on what has transpired for him since graduation. I was proud to update him on the new Perdue School of Business building, and Byron was pleased to hear about the significant growth in the number of students majoring in information systems.

As his NFL dreams are realized, it would be easy for Byron to forget his Perdue School aspirations. This is not the case with this Redskin. Byron maintains his interest in information systems and still hopes to pursue research and opportunities in the area of enterprise systems. I can’t wait to see what is next for this rising star on and off the field.