



Mike Greenlar / Staff photographer

TIM GREEN talks with Marty Clanton, 12, of the Kirk Park Colts football team on Tuesday night in Syracuse. Green, who has been visiting a lot of kids this summer, was at the Colts' practice giving away autographed copies of his first young adult novel, "Football Genius."

Tim Green Tackles Young Readers

Ex-NFL player turned author is keen on books

By Laura T. Ryan
Staff writer

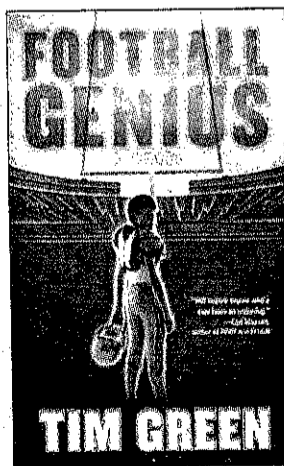
Thirty-some children are trying to make the hard turn from lunchtime recess racket to courteous attention, on a hot August afternoon.

Dismissed a few at time from their lunch tables at the Assisi Center on North Salina Street, they settle into rows of metal folding chairs, which betray their every movement with a tell-tale squeak. But the pokes, whispers and chair squeaks gradually subside, and the children lift their eyes to the tall, smiling man at the front of the room.

"It's good to see all you guys and gals," says the man, wearing pressed chinos and holding a book. "I want to talk to you about some different things about books and reading."

This is not Tim Green's typical promotional book tour.

For one thing, the Skaneateles author doesn't plan to sell any books on this stop; he brought a box of copies already bought and paid for, to distribute to kids enrolled in this free summer arts program for middle-schoolers on the city's North Side.



played in shaping his own success as a pro-football player, lawyer and best-selling writer.

Green says he wants to use "Football Genius" to light the same path for others, especially youngsters who might have turned their backs on books.

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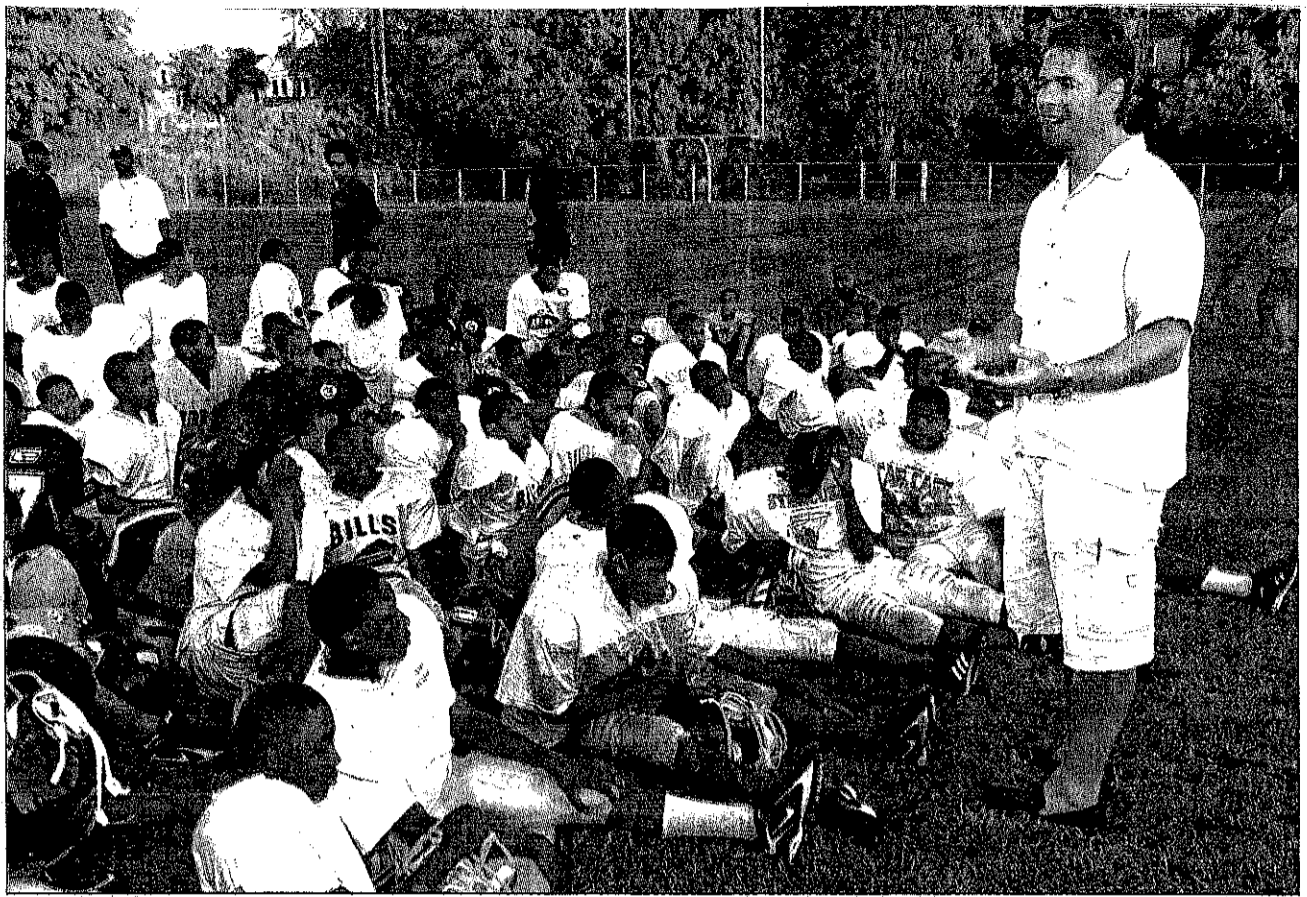
And he spends about half his allotted time talking to the kids not about the new book — his first young adult novel, "Football Genius" — but about the role books

Green says the previous day, sitting in the wood-paneled library of his house on the eastern shore of Skaneateles Lake. "But also girls. . . . There's a gap for reading material for kids who are interested in sports and maybe are not big readers in that age range."

Barbara Lalicki, an editorial director at HarperCollins Children's Books, approached Green with the idea of a football YA novel.

"It is so hard to really find a good, fast-paced adventure that boys especially are going to want to read and that's going to speak directly to them, and I thought he certainly would be able to fill that gap," Lalicki says. "It's rewarding for a non-sports fan, too, because (main character) Troy is such an underdog. So he's a character you root for."

Green also thinks he can help fill the gap, if not with his YA novel, then at least with anecdotes from his life, which he plans to recite upward of 30 times this fall, in visits to Central New York schools and libraries, (when he's not traveling to Chicago, Atlanta,



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FORMER SU football and NFL player Tim Green speaks to the Kirk Park Colts football team on Tuesday night. Green, now an author, said he wrote his latest book, "Football Genius," because, "there's a gap right now in reading material for young people between the ages of 10 and 14, especially for boys."

Connecting Kids and Books

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Philadelphia, Los Angeles and New York City on the official book tour).

In communities where he suspects the children cannot afford the book, Green plans to bring free copies. Elsewhere, he's waiving the usual author appearance fee and encouraging the schools to use the money to buy books.

"I'm excited about this as a tool to get kids to read, because for me, reading is two things," Green, 43, says. "One, it's incredible entertainment that I always enjoyed as a kid. Secondly, reading is what I call exercise for the mind. . . . As an athlete, you have to train. You have to lift weights, you have to run to get stronger, to get better. Reading makes you stronger and better mentally. It makes you better in school, which opens so many doors of opportunity later in life."

A 1982 graduate of Liverpool High School, Green went on to Syracuse University, where he was a two-time football All-American. Then he played eight seasons as a defensive end with the NFL's Atlanta Falcons. In the off-seasons, he earned a Syracuse University law degree and began to write books.

"I thought I would go to the NFL and make a lot of money," Green explains to the kids in the Assisi program run by Dominic Robinson (whom Green met through his father, SU football coach Greg Robinson). "But I didn't know for sure."

Green says he tackled his first book manuscript by dividing it into manageable pieces. Assuming his book would have 400 pages, and allowing himself four years to write it, Green committed to two pages a week.

He has written 12 suspense novels since then — at a considerably quicker pace.

Green also explains to the kids how books helped him in sports — mostly by keeping his anxieties in check. He often read right before a game.

"I'd be sitting there in the locker room, with all my pads, my Atlanta Falcons uniform on, getting ready to play

the Chicago Bears," he says. "(A book) would take me to another time and place. It was like meditation for me."

And, finally, Green urges his young audience to abandon any book that doesn't give them absolute enjoyment.

"If it's not fun, put the book down and go get another book," Green says.

In an earlier conversation, he elaborates: "One thing I think we make a mistake at in our educational system is throwing classics at young kids, even high school kids, that are inaccessible and slow," he says. "I don't care how brilliant 'Moby-Dick' is. For 99.99 percent of the kids, that is not a fun book to read. . . . It's worse than broccoli. It's cardboard. Because you can't get it down. And so when we put those kinds of books in front of our kids and say, 'Here, this is what reading is about,' in their English classes, kids get turned off. Reading should be fun, first. It should be fun."

Then, at last, Green tells the kids about his book, "Football Genius." It's the story of 12-year-old Troy White (patterned after Green's 13-year-old son Troy Green), who has an uncanny ability to analyze a football team's tendencies and then predict every play. When his single mom gets a job with the Atlanta Falcons, Troy gets to test his unique talent from the sidelines of a real NFL game.

"I'm going to take you in the locker room, on the field, down on the sidelines," Green says. "You can see it, hear it and smell it."

Publishers Weekly agreed, commending Green in a review for "deliver(ing) a satisfying YA debut, using his own NFL experience to bring readers behind the scenes."

By the time Green gets around to reading aloud the first few chapters in "Football Genius," a hush falls over the room at Assisi Center.

"I think it was great," program director Robinson says. "The kids all seemed to have been really engaged."

But the true test: They all line up afterward, to have Green sign their books.

Keeping time with Tim

Skaneateles author and attorney Tim Green plans to do plenty of talking about reading in the weeks ahead.* Here's his schedule of local appearances:

- Sept. 14: Skaneateles High School and Barnes & Noble, DeWitt.
- Sept. 17: Syracuse Hebrew Day School and Holy Cross School, DeWitt.
- Sept. 18: Willow Field Elementary School, Liverpool.
- Sept. 19: Chestnut Hill Elementary School, Liverpool.
- Sept 21: Cazenovia Middle School.
- Sept. 24: Solvay Middle School.
- Sept 25: Donald S. Ray Middle School, Baldwinsville.
- Oct. 2: Bishop Grimes Junior Senior High School, East Syracuse.
- Oct. 3: East Syracuse Elementary School and Pine Grove Middle School, East Syracuse.
- Oct. 4: Roxboro Middle School, Syracuse, and Eagle Hill Middle School, Manlius.
- Oct. 9: Lyncourt School, Syracuse.
- Oct. 10: State Street Intermediate School, Skaneateles, and Soule Road Elementary, Liverpool.
- Oct. 15: Fremont Elementary School, East Syracuse, and Nate Perry Elementary, Liverpool.
- Oct. 16: West Genesee Middle School, Syracuse.
- Oct. 17: LeMoyne Elementary School, Syracuse.
- Oct. 31: Gillette Road Middle School, Cicero.
- Nov. 9: Skaneateles High School.

* Somewhere in-between, HarperCollins Children's Books plans to send Green to Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City and Philadelphia to promote his new young adult novel, "Football Genius."