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For The Oakland Press

There ain't no such thing as a free lunch.

The inference is that everything comes with a price tag dangling somewhere.

Who can argue with the cynicism? That free vacation to Vegas comes with an unrelenting, high-pressure sales pitch to purchase a timeshare property. That free soda arrives only when you purchase another.

Sorry, but there is no small print with the Fifth Annual Believe to Achieve Free Youth Football Camp. There are absolutely no strings attached to camp director Pat Cavanaugh's pledge to keep it free of charge.

"I could charge \$30. I could charge \$20. Either way, there would be a lot of kids who wouldn't be able to come," he said. "I could only charge \$5, but there would still be kids who could not afford it.

"The idea of free is that it gets kids here and it allows myself and the other coaches to have a forum to teach these kids the game of football. School is free, public education is free, and this is a camp that educates kids in the ways of football and gets them to believe in themselves."

Cavanaugh is a principal at Susick Elementary, a Warren Consolidated School located in Troy.

He graduated from Bishop Foley High School in Madison Heights, where he was the captain of the football team. He went on to play at Saginaw Valley and overcame the reality of being No. 6 on the depth chart at quarterback to start three years in the defensive secondary and captain the Cardinals for two seasons. He also played some arena football.

Even though registration has closed for this year's camps, there are actually two sessions. The first session was held July 9 and July 10, and went on for three hours each day. The second session will be Friday and Saturday.

Each camper receives a T-shirt. He also receives instruction from highly qualified coaches, all of whom have or are still playing in college.

Among those campers Friday was Demetrius Ross Jr., 9, of Mount Clemens. His dad, Demetrius Ross, brought his son and three nephews to the field.

"My son is just starting to play football, and this is a good learning experience for him," said Ross. "We were in the backyard earlier this week. I set up some cones and taught him some things.

"My nephews were there, too. Demetrius is an outstanding student. He gets straight A's and

playing football is sort of a reward for his hard work.”

Demetrius Ross has four brothers and sisters. Dad hails from Ohio, and played football at East High in Cleveland. He’s been living in Michigan for nearly 20 years.

He’s a licensed plumber and does commercial and residential jobs, but things have been fairly slow for a couple of months. He has bids out on a couple of big jobs.

“I think these coaches are doing a good job,” said Demetrius Ross, gazing out at the football field. “The fact that it’s free is really something. You’ve got millionaires who wouldn’t think about doing this kind of thing for people.”

Not many of us are millionaires.

Mostly, in this area, we are working people at best.

Too many of us are still working people without a place to punch in and go to work.

The Believe to Achieve camp might be free, but the learning is invaluable. The campers were broken down into four age groups and rotated to different stations. They worked on defensive fundamentals Friday, and were going to emphasize offense Saturday.

Two coaches were at each station, and the instruction was thorough. It was all positive, too. “Good!” “Excellent!” “Nice job!” were unrelenting themes. If a youngster was going to be turned off by the idea of playing football, it certainly was not going to happen at the Warren Community Center.

“When I left Saginaw Valley and got into college coaching, I just had a strong passion for the game of football and I enjoy working with young kids,” Cavanaugh said. “To me, it wasn’t about making money or creating a business out of it, it was more about providing an opportunity for kids who may not be able to afford a camp. I wanted to provide them with the same opportunity that I had; to be coached and learn the game of football.

“A big question families and kids have when the subject of a football camp comes up is how much does it cost? We wanted to make sure that wasn’t a question at all. We get kids from all over; from Novi to Dearborn Heights to Mount Clemens.

“I was fortunate to have a network of young, energetic coaches who I have played with our met along the way. They do not make a dime,” continued Cavanaugh.

Sponsors like McDonald’s, Warren Parks and Recreation, Ideal Graphics, Shelving Inc., Kachi Creations and jbrooks design also help.

There ain’t no such thing as a free lunch? Nobody said anything about a free football camp, though.