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Guerin Emig: Tyler Lockett reads to children and you feel the beating heart beneath the NFL corporation

By Guerin Emig Tulsa World Jun 21, 2018 Updated 13 hrs ago



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Seattle Seahawks receiver Tyler Lockett reads to kids at the Tulsa Central Library on Thursday. STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa W

He had already read the 100 or so kids "The Cat in the Hat," and sat in the late morning sun to take every last picture with them. Now Tyler Lockett was tossing a football with some of them from one

end of the courtyard to the other.

An older gentleman wandered over to the Seattle Seahawks receiver as he cut loose another spiral, giggled and said: "Tyler, they will never forget this the rest of their lives."

It was a lovely scene inside the Tulsa City-County Library's A.R. and Marylouise Tandy Foundation Children's Garden on Thursday morning.

"The biggest thing is when you're around kids you get to be a kid again," Lockett said. "Everything doesn't always have to be about business."

I was fortunate to be there, to see the Booker T. Washington alum come home, give back and have fun. But I kept thinking how nice it would have been had Roger Goodell been there, too.

The commissioner's National Football League has never been more about brand over body. It is a corporation that goes to absurd lengths to marginalize its players, whether over their physical well being (Google "NFL concussion fight") or their social awareness (the national anthem flap).

Human beings can get lost behind a logo. That is a terrible shame, and a blown opportunity when you realize occasionally there are warm, thoughtful men behind those face masks.

Lockett is one of those men, unfazed by his status as an All-Pro or a millionaire. He wore a T-shirt and sweatpants Thursday, and before he started reading he made his way around the garden to greet every child.

"What's your name? Angel? Nice to meet you, Angel. I'm Tyler."

"Who's your favorite player? Is it Tyler Lockett? Don't tell Russell Wilson."

Lockett invited a grade schooler named Moses to sit next to him before cracking open "The Cat in the Hat." He asked about the youngster's classes and about sports. Moses said he played football.

"You like to catch the ball? Yeah?" Lockett said, smiling. "Nothing wrong with that."

Lockett read Dr. Seuss, pausing before each page-turn to show his audience the pictures. Then he read "Pete the Cat," asked the kids for the moral of the story and crawled across the lawn to the little boy who answered.

"That's right," Lockett said. "Sometimes you don't need the things you think you need to make you happy ... The people around you here today? That's what you need to make you happy."



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“Miss Nelson Has a Field Day” came next, a story about the woeful Smedley Tornadoes football team that finally won. Lockett added some snap to his narration when he got to the big Thanksgiving game. He finished and reminded his audience to work hard and listen to their coaches and teachers.

The pictures, autographs and football toss followed, Lockett as natural in this element as on Seattle’s CenturyLink Field. He approached reporters, the back of his blue shirt stained with sweat, and talked about going to see his dad, NFL wide receiver Kevin Lockett, read to Tulsa children as a youngster.

“It was a youth ranch, around 46th Street over by Tastee Freez on Cincinnati,” he said. “It’s not there anymore.”

The spirit is.

“You always come back to where you grew up,” Lockett said. “It’s easy to relate to a lot of the kids because they grew up where you grew up and went to the same schools you attended.”

At one point Lockett even reminisced about playing soccer at old Barnard Elementary.

“Everybody used to play at recess,” he said. “I used to try to go score all the time.”

It was a delightful sentiment on the kind of personal day that can cut through a corporation, that can allow you to see the beating heart behind a booming enterprise.

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Guerin Emig

Sports Columnist Guerin Emig

Proud father of Gretchen and Holden. Devoted husband to Christy, who has been my best friend since biology class at Booker T. Washington. I covered the Oklahoma Sooners for 15 years. That was both challenging and rewarding. Now I get to write columns.

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-
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