



Seth Franco, a native New Yorker and the second white Globetrotter in the team's 100-year history, spins a ball and puts it on a fan's finger as Mr. Franco talks with kids before an event Monday evening at White Hall's Whiteside Park. Mr. Franco discussed his faith and performed basketball routines for the crowd, part of a tour of the area that continues through today.

Globetrotting with a message

BY JESSICA MCKINNON
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Former star captivates audiences

WHITE HALL — Over 100 people gathered at Whiteside Park here Monday night to receive a gospel message with special spin.

Former Harlem Globetrotter Seth Franco, 26, visited the small community as part of a national tour aimed at spreading the age-old story of human redemption. Mr. Franco joined the Globetrotters for their 2003-04 World Tour, then was forced to retire due to medical problems.

The Long Island, N.Y., native wowed the crowd of children and adults with a choreographed basketball-handling routine.

"I believe you don't need a little altar to come before God," Mr. Franco said. "Wherever you go, you can humble yourself before God."

Mr. Franco took the small wooden stage after a rousing

sequence of tunes by the Jacksonville-based Christian rock band Messenger, sharing his talent and his personal testimony with the crowd.

Small children who were transfixed by his agility with the basketball sat in a grassy area in front of the stage and listened intently to his message.

Mr. Franco spoke to the crowd about his background in Christianity and why he believes personal faith in Jesus Christ is important for everyone.

"The best feeling is to go to bed at night knowing that you've made the right decisions in your life," Mr. Franco said. "I believe the best decision you can ever make in your life is to give your heart to Jesus Christ and put your faith in him."

Mr. Franco, who had a background in motivational speaking

before his stint with the Globetrotters, said that after getting married last fall, he and his wife, Sarah, decided to go on the road. Their goal is encouraging children everywhere to stay focused and follow their dreams.

"We go to public schools, youth rallies, church services and community events, like the one being held today," Mr. Franco, who visited North Greene schools on Monday, said. "When we are in public schools, we always honor that they don't want us to share our faith in detail, so we share an anti-drug message."

Mr. Franco's message ended with an informal altar call of sorts. Dozens of children and even a few adults gathered around the stage with heads bowed in the setting sun as the basketball player prayed with

Schedule of events

Seth Franco will be speaking at the following times and locations in Jacksonville today:

- Garrison School - 10 a.m.
- Westfair Christian Academy - 1:30 p.m.
- Jacksonville High School - 3:15 p.m.
- Jacksonville Assembly of God - 7 p.m.

them to accept Christ into their lives.

Audience member and White Hall native Juanita Hendrickson said she felt Mr. Franco's message was just what the young people needed to hear. "I think Seth's message was marvelous," said Mrs. Hendrickson, who's father and husband are pastors. "Everyone needs to hear this message."