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The Daniel High School football team is pictured with quarterback Bryce Young, center left, and defensive lineman DeShawn Williams of the Carolina Panthers, center right, following the teams' unified practice on Tuesday at Wofford College in Spartanburg. The Lions spent the morning with the Panthers at training camp, mingling with players including Williams, who starred at both Daniel and Clemson.

'It was amazing'

Lions practice with Panthers in Spartanburg

BY IAN TAYLOR
THE JOURNAL



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Carolina Panthers defensive lineman DeShawn Williams is pictured with Daniel head coach Jeff Fruster on Tuesday in Spartanburg.

CENTRAL — Many high school football players have dreams of playing at the highest level, rubbing shoulders with the best of the best in the NFL and playing under the brightest lights in American sports.

While Daniel High School's players may be some years away from seeing if their NFL dreams pan out, they did get an up-close look at how the pros do it on Tuesday when they shared a practice field in at Wofford College in Spartanburg with the Carolina Panthers.

While Lions head coach Jeff Fruster noted that the two teams weren't truly sharing a joint practice, it was still special nonetheless.

"It was pretty exciting — you don't get to do that too often," Fruster said. "We stretched with them, we went our way and they went their way. We got together to

do our team stuff and they watched us, and we watched them. There was some intermingling at times, but really, we just happened to be in the same place."

Fruster, who was named the 2021 Carolina Panthers High School Coach of the Year, said it was all-time great moment for his players, and himself.

"I can get starstruck over coaches, too," he said. "I remember in 1995 when the Panthers started and (now-Panthers head coach) Frank Reich was the quarterback. Now he's running the team."

Something that stood out immediately to Lions offensive lineman Watson Young was just the differences between high school players and pros.

"They're a lot bigger in person," he said. "We met them before we started stretching. I was shaking their hands and pretty much looking up at some

LIONS: Spend morning alongside NFL players

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of them — especially the offensive tackles. Some of the guards and centers were about my size height-wise, but they were humongous, and they could move. I was watching them at the end, and they looked so smooth in everything they did.”

Also noting the size difference was defensive lineman Jaedyn Young,

who walked away with a different perspective than he came in with.

“They’re all huge,” he said. “I got humbled. I thought I was big.”

He also got the chance to meet two-time Pro Bowl pass rusher Brian Burns, who said showed him a lot after he finished up a one-on-one drill.

“You always want to play hard, but it makes you want to play harder knowing they’re watch-

ing, cheering us on,” he said.

One of the players keeping an eye on the Lions was someone who was in their shoes just over a decade ago. Defensive tackle DeShawn Williams, who was born in Central and played at Daniel from 2007-2011 and played at Clemson, is in his first training camp with Carolina after signing in the offseason.

After the practice, Wil-

liams said it was “amazing” to see young players wearing the same jerseys he did years ago now looking up to him.

“It was a really good experience, just practicing alongside them,” Watson Young said. “It was amazing, and it’s probably something I’ll remember for my whole life.”

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