

Super (Bowl) Coleman Reaches Out to NJ Kids with Hearing Loss

By Joel Strasser, APR, Fellow PRSA, Trustee and Public Information Officer, Hearing Loss Association of America, New Jersey (HLAA-NJ)

As announced on WCBS-TV in the days just before the big game, the one football player wearing hearing aids in last month's Super Bowl, which was held in New Jersey, was Derrick Coleman of the Seattle Seahawks. This was announced by sports anchor Otis Livingston, who also lives in New Jersey, and was further motivated by his on-air admission that he has a son and daughter who also experience hearing loss. The Seahawk's Coleman story was further expanded on in the New York Daily News about the football pro's thoughtfulness and generosity in presenting a signed football and Coleman's jersey, with Derrick's number 40, (which would have been hard to get locally) to 10-year old Pat Coleman, a young fan from nearby Allentown, Pennsylvania who has experienced hearing loss since he was nine months old.

But there was more to Derrick Coleman's compassion to other fans with hearing loss. In another instance, 9-year old New Jersey twins with hearing loss, Riley and Erin Kovalcik opted to send tweets of support to Derrick Coleman as the Seahawks were making their way through the playoffs. Generally, things could have ended right there, as athletes and the NFL probably get inundated daily with messages on their Twitter accounts. Sifting through and finding one specific tweet is almost as unlikely as Coleman playing in the NFL and a young girl on the complete opposite side of the United States finding inspiration in his story.

Yet Coleman did more than find the letter on his Twitter account. Where most athletes might have responded with a simple "thank you" or a simple nod of thanks - if he saw the letter at all - the 23-year old Seahawks fullback said he appreciated the fact that the child did not want anything.

"I think it was one of those things where she was not asking for anything, not an autograph or something. She was just saying, "I have faith in you. You're my inspiration, and I hope you do well in everything you do."

"That kind of just touched my heart a little bit," Coleman said.

It didn't stop there. On learning of the Kovalciks' story, ABC's Good Morning America invited the family on to the show to tell their story during Super Bowl week. There, Riley and Erin told viewers how they were inspired by Coleman's appearance in a hearing-aid battery commercial.

"We were so happy that there was actually somebody that was good and could understand everything about hearing aids and that could help you."

This being television and all, Riley and Erin weren't just there to tell their story. They were there to meet their idol. During the show, Coleman came out to surprise the twins, not only making their dreams come true, but also inviting the entire Kovalcik family to watch the Seahawks play the Denver Broncos at the Super Bowl.

Those were really first-class gestures by the Seahawk's running back which we salute. We would also like to invite both the Kovalcik and the Otis Livingston families to join HLAA-NJ.