

# UGA football player pays visit to Clarkesville Elementary School



CHAMIAN CRUZ/Staff

University of Georgia football star Rodrigo Blankenship addresses students at a pep rally at Clarkesville Elementary School.

## BY KEATON BENFIELD

A dream that started out as just a thought recently turned into a reality.

This happened when Marie Benfield, secretary at Clarkesville Elementary School, thought, "What if I could get Rodrigo Blankenship to come and speak to our students?"

Blankenship is one of her favorite University of Georgia (UGA) football players and she knew the students would benefit and be inspired if she could make this visit a reality.

After numerous phone calls and emails, Benfield received confirmation on May 7 from Robert Miles, director of CHAMPS/Life Skills program for the Athletic Association at UGA, saying Blankenship would like to visit with the students at Clarkesville Elementary May 14.

Benfield spoke with several staff members to let them know what was going to be happening and in less than four days, they all had red and black decorations, including posters, banners and signs. They were ready for their visitor and decided it needed to be a pep rally to celebrate students'

accomplishments.

The students knew they were getting a special visitor, but they didn't know who it was until the final hall banner, which said, "Clarkesville Elementary Loves Rodrigo," was hung about three hours before the pep rally started. When the students walked down the hall and glanced at the banner and read the name, they were all excited. Some students were heard asking their friends if they knew Blankenship was their special guest.

The time finally arrived and Blankenship and Miles arrived at Clarkesville Elementary. After a brief rundown of events, Blankenship paraded down the hall to the gym while being cheered on by students that lined the hallways. To really make it feel like a pep rally, a banner that said "Finish Strong" was held by Jackson Adams and Michael Hill, who are both fifth-grade students.

After being introduced by Patrick Franklin, principal of Clarkesville Elementary, Blankenship ran through the banner



BLANKENSHIP

and was greeted by cheers from Clarkesville Elementary students. He spoke to the students and said to always do their best and to set goals for themselves and always try to excel in everything they chose to do.

Blankenship gave several examples of goals he set for himself. Several students were even given the opportunity to ask Blankenship questions.

After speaking with the students, they were entertained as Blankenship interacted with staff in a quick football game.

Once the pep rally was over, Blankenship signed shirts, pictures, stuffed animals, and chatted with students and staff who were inspired by Blankenship's visit.

Amy Gailey, a Clarkesville Elementary kindergarten teacher, said, "Even this Auburn fan got a little teary." This shows the impact Blankenship's visit had on staff and students alike.

It was a great day and will be remembered for years to come. Benfield said this was a great way

of Blankenship to the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia, which supplies the food for over 200 students in Habersham County.

Each Friday, these students receive a bag of food delivered to the school to take home each weekend.

Rene Grant, Habersham County Food 2 Kids coordinator, along with her husband, Mike Grant, attended the pep rally and received the donation in

honor of Blankenship.

If you would like more information on the Food 2 Kids Program, please contact René Grant at rgrant@habershamschools.com.

All Habersham County businesses, schools and churches are encouraged to consider donating to the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia, P.O. Box 48857, Athens, GA 30604.

Please indicate Habersham County on the check.

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