

MIAMI, F.L.L. / MIAMI, F.L.L. / MIAMI, F.L.L.



**BLACK
EXCELLENCE**
— IS —
**LIBERTY CITY
OPTIMIST
CLUB**

**YOLANDA BETHUNE
& TAMEIKA WILEY**

**HONORING
BLACK
EXCELLENCE:
VOL. 6**

THE KINGDOM

IS WHERE BLACK EXCELLENCE LIVES

Honoring Black Excellence is an adidas initiative that celebrates the achievements of Black individuals and Black culture as a whole. Sport, culture, and service are rooted in the Black community. For that reason, we're highlighting honorees from all across the country, from elite athletes to everyday individuals dedicated to service, offering each one a platform to help give back and share their stories. We are honored to bring you the story of the Liberty City Optimist Club.

Cover art and illustrations by
Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux



Photos courtesy of adidas



Photos courtesy of adidas



Photo courtesy of adidas
Illustrations by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux



GENESIS

To many, Luther Campbell, aka Uncle Luke, is known for his work as the frontman in the group *2 Live Crew*. To the folks in Liberty City, an underserved community in Miami, his biggest contribution has been as a Co-founder of the Liberty City Optimist Club of Florida, at Charles Hadley Park.

The Liberty City Optimist Club is a beacon of Black excellence that exists far beyond the glitz and glamour of Star Island and Key Biscayne. This organization has served as a pillar within and around Liberty City, as it has several wings of operation aimed at serving at-risk youth in the community through a wide variety of sports and after-school activities. Most notable of these is the football program, the Liberty City Warriors.

The Warriors have become the city's legendary youth football program, and were the subject of a docuseries, *Warriors of Liberty City*, on *STARZ*. Their alumni read like a who's who of elite level talent, including Duke Johnson, Devonte Freeman, Lavonte Davis, Deandre Baker, Tutu Atwell and Chad Johnson; just to name a few.

GENESIS

The organization also offers cheer, basketball, baseball, softball, flag football, and soccer, and has a robust after-school program.

Yolanda Bethune and Tameika Wiley are devoted to enriching lives through their efforts with the Liberty City Optimist Club. Their journey with the club began 25 years ago, as mothers whose sons became involved in the program. Their bond became much deeper than simply having boys who loved



sports. Bethune and Wiley have become the leaders of the club's afterschool program, serving as Program Director and Program Manager respectively. They help support the club in various initiatives throughout the year. They work to serve others, helping to make each day better and brighter for the local youth involved in the program. "You're dealing with a lot of urban kids," says Bethune, "[to them] this is like a safe haven. This is the only place to keep them out of trouble and give them a place where they feel safe."

TAMEIKA'S CHILDREN AS LIBERTY CITY WARRIORS
Photos courtesy of Tameika Wiley and Yolanda Bethune
Illustration by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux

“ ”

YOU'RE DEALING WITH A LOT OF URBAN KIDS," SAYS BETHUNE, "[TO THEM] THIS IS LIKE A SAFE HAVEN. THIS IS THE ONLY PLACE TO KEEP THEM OUT OF TROUBLE AND GIVE THEM A PLACE WHERE THEY FEEL SAFE.



Photo courtesy of Yolanda Bethune





“ ”

EVEN THOUGH I RELOCATED
AND MOVED TO THE
SOUTHERN END OF MIAMI,
I WOULD ALWAYS
COME BACK
BECAUSE OF YOLANDA;
ONCE A WARRIOR
ALWAYS A WARRIOR.

Football was the catalyst to these women coming together and fulfilling their destiny to build and uplift the people around them. Bethune explains, “I joined Liberty City Optimist Club in ‘96, and I was a team mom... the founder Samuel K. Johnson (The Ultimate Warrior), and his wife, Ms. Margaret Johnson, asked me to come and help in the office. I initially began by helping them with registration for all of the sports; football, basketball and cheer. From there, after Mr. Johnson gained his heavenly wings, I became an Assistant Director and later the Program Director of the Afterschool Program.”

Wiley was also a team mom, whose sons were involved with football at an early age. She met the Bethunes, and their families have been intertwined from that point. Wiley expressed, “our kids were in the same weight division and we both were team moms...Yolanda didn’t appear to be the sociable type, but I saw in her something completely different. We both gravitated to the program for numerous reasons; It’s always been a family-oriented organization, and the passion we both shared for the kids; however, [Yolanda’s] been here forever.”

She expounded further, sharing, “Even though I relocated and moved to the southern end of Miami, I would always come back because of Yolanda; once a Warrior always a Warrior. Ultimately, I ended up here working with the program because [Yolanda] was offered the opportunity to do something on her own and who else would help her do it, but me?”

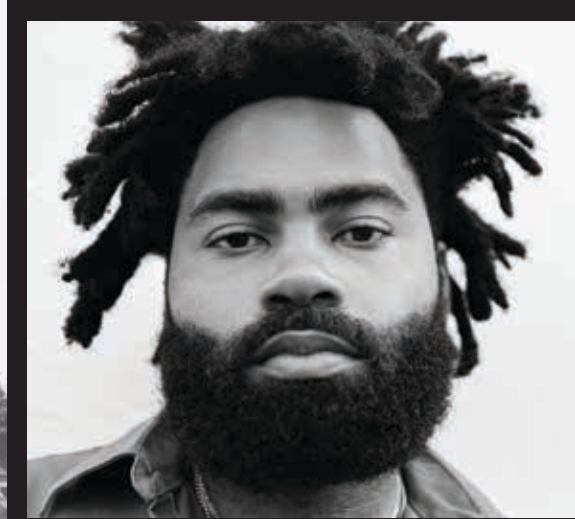
Illustration by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux



AARON J. JACKSON IS A VISUAL ARTIST SPECIALIZING IN PORTRAIT, MUSIC, AND DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY. HE IS ALSO A LIFELONG RESIDENT OF MIAMI'S LIBERTY CITY NEIGHBORHOOD.



@BYAARONJJACKSON WWW.AARONJJACKSON.COM



JACKSON USES STORYTELLING AS A CRITICAL COMPONENT TO INTIMATELY CAPTURE THE BEAUTY AND GRIT OF HIS SUBJECTS. HIS WORK CHRONICLES REAL LIFE, EXPLORING CONCEPTS OF IDENTITY, PHYSICAL SPACE, AND RAW EMOTION. HIS IMAGES OF THE WARRIORS AND THEIR COMMUNITY CAPTURE THE SPIRIT, PASSION, RESILIENCE AND JOY OF THE RESIDENTS OF LIBERTY CITY.





FORMATION

The biggest key to the success of the Liberty City Optimist Club will always be consistency. Any organization that serves a breadth and diversity of children, like Liberty City does, will encounter a variety of needs and challenges. Bethune and Wiley have prioritized structure and a consistent presence to help support all the kids who come through their doors.

“I had some parents that were able to help me, but then there were a lot of parents that you didn’t even see. The coaches would pick up these kids and bring them to practice,” Bethune reflects. “The coaches would take them home. Nine out of ten children, we hardly ever saw their parents, so I was the parent to a lot of them.”

It takes an acute sense of detail and dedication to assist with a wide variety of personalities, problems, and solutions. This dedication to the Liberty City Optimist Club community has had an enormous impact. The Club has changed lives and broken generational curses. Love is at the center of everything, and Bethune will never hesitate to lift others while she continues to climb.

“If I had to do fundraisers to make it happen, get out there to the concession stand and sell Gatorade, candy, and chips to raise money to cover expenses, to make sure that these kids had a halftime snack or end of the game meal, I did that,” says Bethune.

Illustration by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux



Photo courtesy of adidas

In the midst of an outpouring of generosity and kindness from Bethune, Wiley, and their staff, there is quite often an element of danger that looms on the horizon. It is an uphill battle to not only be present and facilitate programs, but to truly protect the community the organization serves. Liberty City, like many socio-economically depressed areas, is prone to violence. Organized sports are a tool to enhance learning and life skills; however, the sad truth is that sometimes the biggest obstacle for young people is the struggle to remain as safe and sound as possible.

Wiley explains the intensity and daily struggle, "We have been on lockdown quite a few times last year and the year before that. It is a lot for kids growing up in Liberty City. I left [the neighborhood] because of shootings leading to deaths that occurred continuously for one week; shooting in broad daylight with no regard for anyone who lived in the area, it was just crazy."

Wiley continued to explain, "Not everyone has the choice or the means to better their situation by moving to a safer environment and everyone within the organization knows this to be true - therefore, everything Liberty City Optimist Club does is for both the present and future."

Bethune sums it up quite simply, "with the help of volunteers, tutors, mentors, and the community support, I feel like Liberty City Optimist [Club] has had a positive impact on the lives of thousands of children, young people, and their families. That's our mission statement. You know, we're here: our mission is to enhance the character and the physical growth and development of at-risk children of all ages."

Illustrations by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux

“ ”



NOT EVERYONE HAS THE CHOICE OR THE MEANS TO BETTER THEIR SITUATION BY MOVING TO A SAFER ENVIRONMENT AND EVERYONE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION KNOWS THIS TO BE TRUE - THEREFORE, EVERYTHING LIBERTY CITY OPTIMIST CLUB DOES IS FOR BOTH THE PRESENT AND FUTURE!



Photo courtesy of Yolanda Bethune



Photo courtesy of adidas



HUSTLE

The partnership between corporations and the Liberty City Optimist Club is vital to the success of the organization as well as the kids and volunteers who are involved. And not just from a financial perspective. The act of being present in an area like Liberty City sends a message to the residents, specifically the kids in that community, that they matter and that there are people who care about their growth as individuals.

Wiley understands the bigger picture, shedding light on the depth of the relationship with adidas. "You know, that reaction from these kids, from the workshops that adidas have done to see how these kids react to something, like 'are you really from adidas?' Like, 'y'all really came down here?' Like 'we're not worthy of a company like adidas coming down and doing something with them one-on-one like, am I worth that much?' So those reactions, for me, is what keeps me going."

&

MOTIVATE



Photo courtesy of adidas

Illustrations by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux

The goal is to make the world a better place, from person to person, street to street, neighborhood to city, and so on and so forth. Despite the difficulties of their surroundings, the children are resolute, so it is imperative to give back and replenish their mind, body, and soul with goodness and mercy.

“The feeling of being a part of this program is unexplainable. I was a part of getting a lot of these kids to where they are today. I’ve impacted kids who have graduated high school; are now in college and those who have embarked on chosen careers after high school. There are instances where they have spoken on the things that they were able to accomplish through the program and I feel good about that. When I say Black excellence, I would say Liberty City [Optimist Club] as a whole. Based on what the program does for the community, the program itself is the epitome of Black excellence.” says Bethune.

“ ”

YOU KNOW,
THAT REACTION FROM
THESE KIDS, FROM THE
WORKSHOPS THAT
ADIDAS HAVE DONE
TO SEE HOW THESE KIDS
REACT TO SOMETHING,
LIKE ‘ARE YOU REALLY
FROM ADIDAS?’



Photo courtesy of adidas

Illustrations by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux



When people work together for their communities, real change happens, and lives are moved in ways that are tough to quantify. Hope is a key ingredient for that type of life-altering dedication and care. Neighbors are standing united to build a strong foundation for the betterment of others.

The care and nurturing that the Liberty City

Photo courtesy of adidas
Illustrations by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux

Optimist Club gives to the young people has had a tremendous impact, and it will carry those children and their families through some extremely arduous times.

“Wiley further elaborated, “I love working with my best friend. I’d say that we are who we are, with the help of Mr. Campbell through his philanthropic efforts and everything that he puts into this program. I wouldn’t describe it from an individual standpoint, but as an organization, what the organization is, what the organization does, who it has helped, I believe that is Black excellence.”

Photo courtesy of adidas
Illustrations by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux

LIBERTY CITY OPTIMIST CLUB



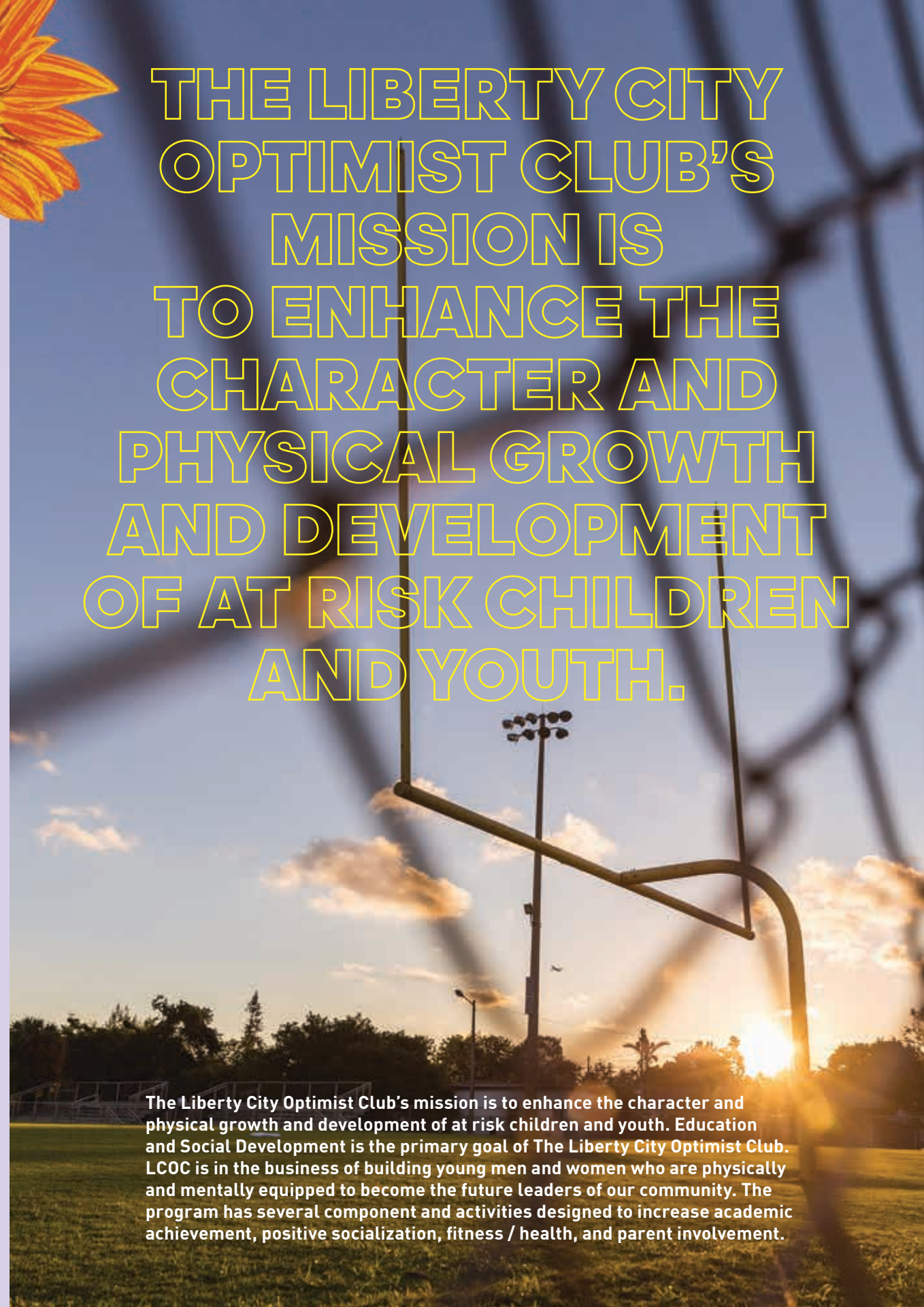
LUTHER CAMPBELL

**CO-FOUNDER OF
LIBERTY CITY
OPTIMIST CLUB**

Photo courtesy of Yolanda Bethune
Illustrations by Brandon Breaux
@bbreaux



THE LIBERTY CITY
OPTIMIST CLUB'S
MISSION IS
TO ENHANCE THE
CHARACTER AND
PHYSICAL GROWTH
AND DEVELOPMENT
OF AT RISK CHILDREN
AND YOUTH.



The Liberty City Optimist Club's mission is to enhance the character and physical growth and development of at risk children and youth. Education and Social Development is the primary goal of The Liberty City Optimist Club. LCOC is in the business of building young men and women who are physically and mentally equipped to become the future leaders of our community. The program has several component and activities designed to increase academic achievement, positive socialization, fitness / health, and parent involvement.

Photo courtesy of adidas
Illustration by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux



I refer to Yolanda and Tameika as my sponsorship team, I go out and solicit donations from politicians, local/ non local businesses and celebrities; I then send Yolanda and Tameika to execute how they'd like to contribute and close the deal. I appreciate the work the ladies do for the organization. However, to keep this motor running, it's a collective effort of our entire team at The Liberty City Optimist Club.

LUTHER CAMPBELL
Co-founder of Liberty City Optimist Club



Photos courtesy of adidas
Illustration by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux



KYLI BAKER

My name is Kyli Baker. The Liberty City Optimist Club has been a fundamental part of my life since the year 2009. This program has contributed to me maturing into the young woman that I am today. I advanced from a Camper to a Volunteer, to an Assistant Counselor. I cheered with the Liberty City Optimist for 10 years and served as a Junior Coach for one year prior to advancing to High School Athletics.



Illustrations by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux



“ ”

THE LIBERTY CITY
OPTIMIST CLUB HAS
BEEN A FUNDAMENTAL
PART OF MY LIFE SINCE
THE YEAR 2009.
THIS PROGRAM HAS
CONTRIBUTED TO
ME MATURING INTO
THE YOUNG WOMAN
THAT I AM TODAY.

Photo courtesy of adidas
Illustration by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux



Being a part of the Liberty City Optimist Summer Program afforded me the opportunity to attend numerous amazing field trips that I otherwise would not have been able to attend.

Through Liberty City Optimist, I have had the honor of meeting a Professional NBA Player that plays for the Miami Heat. I've met Bam Adebayo, and I became one of his Fabulous Five, which is an academic accolade for the Top Five Scholars in the LCOC after school program. The Fabulous Five were rewarded with an autographed Jersey. Additionally, the students in the LCOC Afterschool program with the highest GPA for each grade level were given a Christmas Wishlist by the BAM foundation for the upcoming season. Each student was

instructed to make a list of five items that they wished for, and their wishes were granted. I also had the opportunity to participate in an adidas photoshoot.

The entire staff at Liberty City Optimist Club have all been available for me whenever I've needed anything, whether it was regarding school, a job, or my mental health. I've also been graced to have Mr. Luther Campbell, Co-Founder and President of the Liberty City Optimist Club as a personal guide to assist me in staying on the right path with my academics.

Photo courtesy of adidas
Illustration by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux





Illustrations by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux

“ ”

PLAY LIKE A
WARRIOR

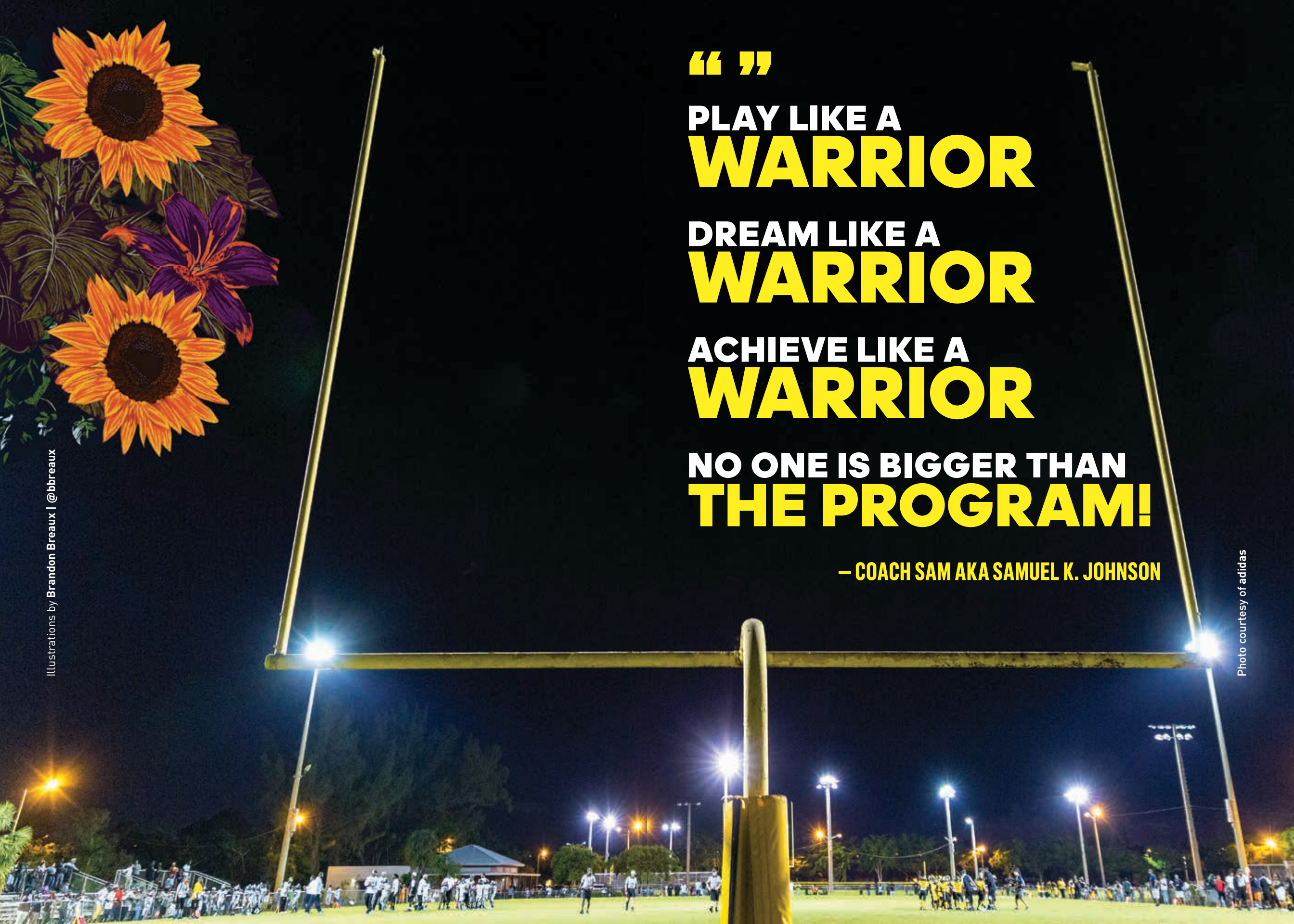
DREAM LIKE A
WARRIOR

ACHIEVE LIKE A
WARRIOR

NO ONE IS BIGGER THAN
THE PROGRAM!

— COACH SAM AKA SAMUEL K. JOHNSON

Photo courtesy of adidas



MIAMI, F.L. / MIAMI, F.L. / MIAMI, F.L.



 Honoring
Black
Excellence

Cover art and illustrations by **Brandon Breaux** | @bbreaux