

Healthy Champs

Parents encourage MLK athletes to boost performance with Vitamin D nutrition program

In DeKalb County, Martin Luther King Jr. High School has produced an impressive sports resume over the past 2 years. Consistently taking home titles as state champions and producing a number of stand-out athletes, the MLK Lions have dominated on the football field and the track field. What's their secret? Along with coaching and rigorous practice, the Lions attribute their achievements to nutrition and a daily regimen of Vitamin D.

Two years ago, the parents' Booster Club incorporated vitamin D as part of the nutrition program for MLK's sports teams on the advice of Dr. L. Ray Matthews, who is director of Morehouse surgical critical care at Grady Hospital in Atlanta and a vitamin D researcher. MLK Head Coach Michael Carson, MLK Booster Club President Tony Sylvester, and Rev. B.T. Moore all noted that many MLK athletes were malnourished.

"Most of these students were not receiving a meal from the time they left school until they returned to school the next day," says Coach Michael Carson.

With advice from Dr. Matthews, a "parent-led" nutrition program was started that included feeding the athletes balanced meals every Thursday and Friday afternoon. The Booster Club parents were responsible for overseeing every aspect of the nutrition program—from hiring the caterer to serving the meals themselves.

"As parents, we wanted to make sure the kids received a healthy meal, especially the day before and the day of the game. I personally made sure that my son ate a nutritious meal. He took his vitamin D everyday and so did I," said Corey Tibbs, whose son, Blake, was selected for the CSS High School All-Star Team because of his outstanding performance as a wide receiver.

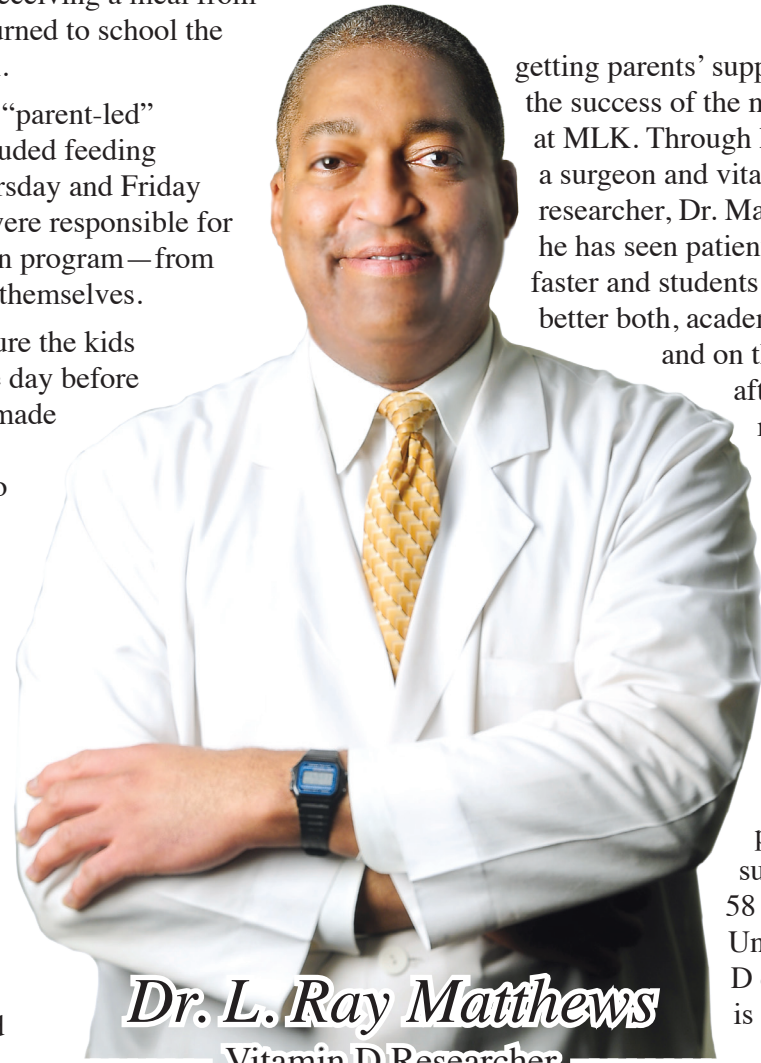
Tibbs said he read a lot of information on his own about vitamin D before the Booster Club started its nutrition program.

"When Dr. Matthews spoke with us, he validated much of what I had already read," Tibbs said.

Dr. Matthews, who has been researching vitamin D since 2007, said



MLK quarterback Jonquel Dawson (No. 5) with Coach Mike Carson and UGA-bound wide receiver Blake Tibbs.



Dr. L. Ray Matthews
Vitamin D Researcher

getting parents' support was key to the success of the nutrition program at MLK. Through his work as a surgeon and vitamin D researcher, Dr. Matthews said he has seen patients heal faster and students perform better both, academically and on the field, after a daily regimen of vitamin D and good nutrition.

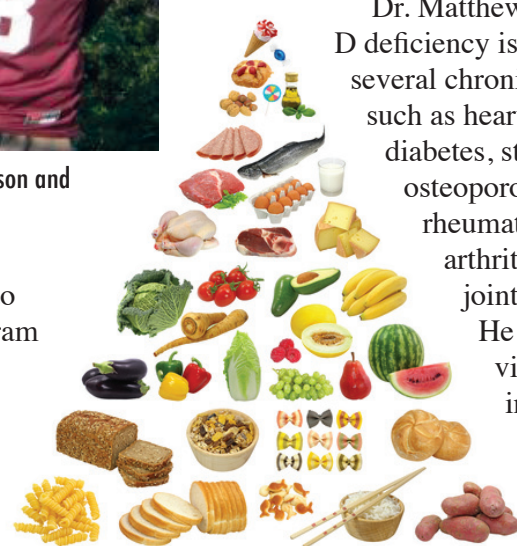
"Vitamin D deficiency is the most common nutritional deficiency in the world, affecting over 1 billion people worldwide," said Dr. Matthews, who is a Morehouse School of Medicine assistant professor of clinical surgery/trauma. "Over 58 million children in the United States are vitamin D deficient. Vitamin D is important for calcium

and phosphorus metabolism, strong bones, muscle strength, and immune modulation."

Vitamin D is a steroid hormone synthesized from cholesterol in exposed skin in response to sunlight (hence, its nickname "the sunshine vitamin"). Dr. Matthews said most Americans do not get enough sunshine. A healthy dose of sunshine, he said, amounts to about 15 minutes per day.

Dr. Matthews said vitamin D deficiency is linked to several chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, asthma, osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis, joint pain, and 17 varieties of cancer. He said athletes who are deficient in vitamin D often times have more injuries.

In 2010, 81 percent of the New York Giants football team



was diagnosed as being vitamin D deficient, as reported during the American Orthopedic Society for Sports Medicine convention held in San Diego. Professional football players with vitamin D levels of less than 30 ng/ml had more injuries including broken bones, sprains, and muscle pain, the society noted.

Dr. Matthews credits high daily doses of vitamin D with helping to reduce the number of injuries among MLK's athletes. Track Coach Eric Merriweather, parents Anthony Sylvester, and the Rev. B.T. Moore say athletic injuries in the school's track and football programs decreased by more than 50 percent.

They said the students are living proof that vitamin D can make a difference in

performance.

"The football team had only one fracture—a broken ankle—during the entire season," said Matthews. "That is very impressive considering the fact that they played 13 games and have 85 athletes on the team."

MLK High School's Champion Highlights

- MLK won the 5-A Georgia State Girls Track Championship in May 2011.
- The football team finished the 2011 season with a 12-1 record and was ranked third in the state's 5-A Division.
- Eleven football players were named to the All-Region First Team.
- Six MLK seniors played in the Georgia State All-Star football game.
- Head Coach Michael Carson was named the "2011 2-5A Regional Coach of the Year" and the "2011 Atlanta Falcons' Georgia 5-A High School Coach of the Year."
- Senior football player and track star Jordan Moore earned recognition as the two-time Georgia 5-A boys 110 meters high hurdles champion in 2010 and 2011.
- Quarterback Jonquel Dawson ranked second as Georgia's all-time career touchdown leader with 93 touchdowns and over 8,700 career yards. He threw for 3,380 yards and 39 touchdowns, earning the Regional 2-5A Player of the Year Award.
- Defensive end Kenderius Whitehead shared 2-5A Regional Co-Defensive Player of the Year award and led the state with 19 sacks and 114 tackles.
- Blake Tibbs (66 rec., 1,084 yards, 15 TDs) and Joshua Stanford (55 rec., 1,014 yards, and 11 TDs) were both 1,000-yard receivers for MLK's high-powered offense.
- MLK was named 2-5A Regional Football Team of the Year.
- The school won the 2-5A Regional Football Championship.
- The school defeated defending Georgia State 5-A champions Brookwood High in the second round of the playoffs.