



## Birk Named Vikings' Man of the Year

12/18/2008 | By Mike Wobschall

Vikings center Matt Birk hosted a pizza party at Winter Park on Tuesday for the winning school of the Vikings/Star Tribune Gridiron Geography program. And during the pizza party, Birk was named Vikings Community Man of the Year by the Vikings Executive Director of Community Relations/Youth Football Brad Madson.

"It's nice to be recognized, but at the same time, I've gotten so much out of it over the years," Birk said. "As a player and as someone who's been blessed, it'd be crazy not to get out there and put smiles on people's faces."

During the season, students throughout the state have been participating in the program that tracks the NFL cities in which the Vikings play. The school was chosen through a drawing of

classrooms participating in the statewide program.

The winner of this year's program was Ms. Lucretia Jeffers' eighth grade classroom from Metcalf Junior High School in Burnsville, Minnesota. In addition to eating lunch in the Vikings cafeteria, the students participated in fitness activities with Birk inside the Winter Park field house.

In addition to having fun with Birk, the students were also treated to a segment of the dynamic program "A Hero Within," presented on behalf of the Vikings by program founder Paul Vitale, professional speaker and author from Little Rock, Arkansas. Highlighting Matt's accomplishments, Vitale reinforced the values of Vikings Community Relations,



Vitale challenges Minnesota students to dare to dream

challenging the students to release their inner hero every day.

Since joining the Vikings in 1998, Birk has been a cornerstone in the Vikings community efforts. In addition, in 2002 Birk established his own HIKE Foundation to help children pursue their educational dreams.

In 2006, Matt made a 12-year \$500,000 commitment and added HIKE SCHOLARS to his programming to provide underserved children support as they go through the key transition points of elementary, middle school, high school and college.

Matt is the team spokesperson for United Way, has made countless school and children's hospital visits and generously supports his teammates' community initiatives as well. Most recently Matt made a \$50,000 contribution to the Gridiron Greats, an organization that helps former NFL players with disabilities who are struggling financially and physically. ■



Paul Vitale with Matt Birk and Brad Madson of the Minnesota Vikings