

This is a printer friendly version of an article from **thetowntalk.com**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Sep 9, 2007

'Jena Six' all ran together -- on the field and off

By **Abbey Brown**

abrown@thetowntalk.com

(318) 487-6387

The "Jena Six" aren't new to making headlines.

While their athletic prowess isn't what thrust the six teens into the current spotlight, their names were splashed across sports pages in the months leading up to the Dec. 4 incident that landed the Jena High School students in jail.

"Jena's Jones, Bell run over Winnfield."

"Bell, Jones look to lead Jena to district title."

"Bell lone Cenla representative on 3A all-state first team."

All six of the students -- originally charged with attempted murder in connection with the assault of student Justin Barker at the high school -- made their names known with their play for the Jena Giant football team.

Mychal Bell and Carwin Jones were standout football players. They were dubbed in a Town Talk article as "Double Trouble" on the football field.

"They are the last guys who are going to take credit for the job that they've done so far this season," former Jena football coach Mack Fowler said in the September 2006 article. "But they deserve every bit of praise they receive."

Arrested opportunities

During the 2006 season -- in which the Giants posted a 7-3 record and barely missed the playoffs -- Jones was a senior tailback who rushed for 797 yards and 11 touchdowns and added four more touchdowns receiving. His counterpart was then-junior fullback/linebacker Bell, who would go on to rush for more than 1,000 yards.

At the time of the September article, Jones, now 18, and Bell, now 17, had led Jena to a 3-0 record.

The pair said they were best friends on and off the field.

"We're good friends," Jones said then. "After this year it'll be tough when I go on to play (football) at college and (Bell) is still here."

But Jones didn't get that opportunity.

He, along with Bell, Robert Bailey Jr., 17, Bryant Purvis, 17, and Theo Shaw, 17, were expelled following the December incident.

And Bell hasn't returned to the football field either. He has been in a LaSalle Parish Jail cell since early December and is scheduled to be sentenced Sept. 20 after being convicted in June of aggravated second-degree battery.

Bell was a juvenile at the time of the incident but was charged as an adult.

Also charged was juvenile Jesse Ray Beard, though he was never expelled.

The Town Talk has decided to name Beard after he has spoken on the record for a number of mainstream media outlets, stood as one of the defendants when the Rev. Al Sharpton spoke last month and has maintained a public presence during rallies and school athletics.

Beard was 14 at the time of the incident and legally couldn't be charged as an adult. Bell was 16.

Louisiana Children's Code states if a child is over the age of 15 and commits one of a list of specific crimes, he or she must be charged as an adult. Attempted murder -- the charge Bell and the others originally faced -- is one of those crimes.

Since returning to school, Beard has shined as one of the Jena Giants' star players on the football field. During this season's opening game -- a 41-12 loss to Marksville -- Beard rushed 14 times for 114 yards and scored one touchdown. He had 91 yards rushing and scored the game-winning touchdown Friday night in the Giants' 12-6 overtime win over Iowa.

Beard also played in the 2006 season with Bell, Jones and Bailey. All of the students except Beard -- who wasn't yet in high school -- played football during the 2004 season. Shaw, Bell, Jones and Purvis played together in the 2005 season.

Recognized athletes

The six are co-defendants, teammates and friends.

"Both Carwin and Mychal are the best of friends," Fowler said in an October Town Talk article. "They motivate and push each other."

Bell and Jones led the way for the Giants to win a district game against Winnfield, 38-8.

"This was a big win for us," Jones said then. "We rose to the occasion when we had to. Mychal Bell and I encourage each other, and my line gave me some holes to run through."

Jones and Purvis weren't limited to just one sport. The two also played for Jena High's basketball team.

After Jones' arrest was announced, Jena boys basketball coach Greg Jones said he felt the incident was "unfortunate."

"I don't know what he did, and I don't want to know," Greg Jones said. "It's up to the school to decide how they're going to discipline him. I'll respect whatever ruling is made."

Although the school's actions and the actions of LaSalle Parish District Attorney Reed Walters have been questioned by countless people, the six students are dealing with the consequences.

Bell was the only Central Louisiana player chosen to the Class 3A all-state football team in the 2006 season -- being named to the squad as a return specialist while sitting in a jail cell facing a charge of attempted murder.

He was a two-way standout for Jena High and would have been the top senior prospect in Cenla after rushing for 1,006 yards and 18 touchdowns as a junior and making 125 tackles.

Marcus Jones, Bell's father, has said his son's suitors included not only Louisiana State University but also Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Georgia Tech, Southern Miss and Louisiana Tech, among others.

Fowler called Bell one of the best players he ever coached, and he has coached several players who have gone on to play in college, including Jason Hatcher -- now a Dallas Cowboy and related to both Purvis and Jones.

"On both sides of the ball, Mychal would have to be right up there at the top. ... Day in and day out, he would have to rank among the top," Fowler said in an interview last month.

Seeing one of his players with so much potential go unfulfilled is tough on Fowler, he said.

"You want all your kids to go on and excel, get their diploma, sign a scholarship and go on to represent their high school," Fowler said. "He had the grades to go just about anywhere. It really is sad it had to end up like this."
