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Virgin Islands Native Returns Home with Pro Players to Make Donation of Baseball Gloves and More to RBI Players

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RBI players with donor Akeem Maynard and baseball players, D'Shawn Knowles and Kameron Wells. By. KIWAUN CUMBERBATCH

Virgin Islands native and president of Leadoff Athletics Akeem Maynard returned home to St. Croix with two pro baseball players to donate upwards of 50 baseball gloves, hats and balls to RBI (Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities) players on Friday evening at the David C. Canegata Ball Park on St. Croix.

RBI players who attended training Thursday through Saturday got the rare opportunity to receive words of wisdom and training tools from two of Mr. Maynard's trainees.

“These are top prospects they get to train with,” said RBI coach Ehrin Lynch. Hailing from Nassau, Bahamas, D’Shawn Knowles, 20, is a minor league player of the major league team, the Los Angeles Angels. Growing up on an island, Mr. Knowles shared that he often trained on the beach at 4 a.m. and had to make sacrifices from a young age in order to realize his dream of going pro.

He shared that at 9 years old, he knew that he wanted to play professionally. “I didn’t really know the work ethic I had to put in. I had to make sacrifices. I gave up friends, prom, [and much more]. Much like Mr. Knowles, Kameron Wells, 22, of Mississippi began playing baseball from 4 years old and continues to work toward his career goals.

When asked what advice he’d give to youths in the Virgin Islands who want to play professionally, he said, “Stay consistent with your work ethic. No days off!”

Mr. Wells is the only person in his family to play a sport. As a child, he shared that his parents encouraged him to try different sporting activities. He said he gravitated to baseball, so he continued to play. Currently, Mr. Wells is in the MLB draft league and is expected to be drafted during Summer 2022.

Both Mr. Knowles and Mr. Wells have come a long way since their juvenile decisions to play baseball, and they are making their dreams a reality.

“If you do want to dream, make your dream a plan. Set short-term and long-term goals. Start there,” said 23-year-old RBI mentor Jahneal Armstrong. He said that he also dreams to play professionally for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Gloves were sponsored by The Evan Michael Chambers Love Foundation, an organization known to donate gloves to children in underprivileged communities.

“This foundation [The Evan Michael Chambers Love Foundation] actually wants to come to the Virgin Islands to have a tournament,” said Mr. Maynard. For more information about the Love Foundation, visit their website.

Additionally, Boston Red Sox player Chris Sale donated more gloves. Baseballs and hats were donated by the #6 prospect of the New York Mets, Mark Vientos.