



# CORPORATE BIG OF THE YEAR

## Merrill Lynch



### Big Austin with Merrill Lynch and Little Angelo at LeFlore High School

In 2012, I got connected with the Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentorship program as a way to get involved and give back to the community. A few colleagues at Merrill Lynch signed up for the program at the same time and we were all matched with students at Prichard Preparatory School. I met Angelo as a 1st grader and we began our weekly meetings at his school. We enjoyed our time hanging out, playing games, and talking about how things were going at school and in his life. Angelo's teachers would update me from time to time on how he was doing in class. Having some insight into Angelo's school day helped me check in on specific challenges he might be having and celebrate with him when he reached certain goals. In May of 2016, I had the opportunity to attend Angelo's 5th grade graduation. It was an honor and privilege to be there with Angelo's family celebrating such a huge accomplishment in his educational career.

As Angelo moved into middle school, we lost touch for a while and weren't able to meet weekly during the school year as we had before. Once we were reconnected, Angelo was about a foot taller and not the 6 year old boy whom I first met as a 1st grader. It was great to pick back up where we left off and reestablish our mentoring relationship. By this point, Angelo was looking ahead to high school and our conversations had shifted from sports and games to careers and future opportunities. The spring of 2020 brought another pause in our mentoring relationship as Covid-19 disrupted our regular school meetings.

Fast forward to the fall of 2020 and Angelo and I reconnected during his freshman year at Leflore High School. Angelo was focused on his schoolwork and working toward graduation. One of the best parts of these meetings was when it was report card time. Without me even asking, Angelo would pull out his report card to show off his grades. Seeing Angelo's pride in sharing the results of his hard work was very meaningful. He was excited to show off his grades and knew that I would be excited to see them. It is an honor and privilege to share in the joy of his successes. Seeing Angelo work hard, focus on his goals, and tune out the distractions around him has been inspiring and humbling.

As Angelo prepares to start his senior year at Leflore, it's hard to believe this will be our last year of school-based mentorship meetings. Our mentoring relationship has provided me with countless opportunities to reflect personally on the role mentors have played in my own life. I wouldn't be where I am today without those people who supported me along the way. Parents, teachers, coaches, friends. Everyone needs a team around them. These are the relationships that provide safety, support, and stability. It has been my honor to be on Angelo's team these past 12 years. He is a remarkable young man and I look forward to seeing where he goes from here.