

## Teen Big of the Year 2021-2022: Ridge Bradford

Matches: Cristoforo/Bradford

MSS: Tiffany Cristoforo

For two years, Teen Big, Ridge Bradford has been a School-Based mentor for two Little Brothers, Michael, and Leo. Michael and Leo both do well in school, but their parent felt they could use some extra encouragement from a positive academic role model. Thanks to their mutual love of sports and passion for baseball, Ridge was specifically chosen to be matched with the brothers, who play baseball in local leagues and share a dream of becoming Major League Baseball players when they grow up. As it turns out, Ridge grew up playing baseball in the same local leagues as Michael and Leo. Today, Ridge is a high school teen who plays baseball for his school team, the Jensen Beach Falcons. As a result, the boys have a lot in common and easily bonded over baseball, school, and life. When asked what he enjoys most about spending time with Ridge, Leo says, *“Ridge once showed me a picture of himself batting of a tee. This is something all baseball players must do to get better. We have fun playing hangman and Tic Tac Toe on zoom (during the pandemic) with me.”*

With Covid-19 restrictions still in place and schools closed, in-person mentoring wasn't an option. Fortunately, Zoom was a great way for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Martin and Palm Beach Counties for us to help our matches stay connected. Bigs and Littles were able to listen to guest speakers, play games, spend time in breakout rooms for personal life conversations, and more, all to help keep the momentum alive.

This school year, matches are participating in Cricket Together a Virtual Mentoring Program. This “digital pen pal” style of mentoring allows Bigs and Littles to log in to their accounts to read exciting stories and write letters to one another at any time. It has been a great way to keep the matches connected while boosting the Little Brothers' reading and writing skills. Improving literacy skills is not the only benefit this program offers. Cricket Together has helped start conversations about sports and deeper discussions about bullying and peer pressure. Michael says, *“We talk about the stories we read, and he writes me letters each month in the in the pen pal program.”* The program has been fantastic for Big Brother Ridge, who is busy with baseball and conditioning, since it allows him to log in when most convenient for his life. Michael and Leo miss seeing their Big Brother and talking in real-time, but the mentoring has still been impactful digitally.

Big Brother Ridge also gives his time volunteering at BBBS events. He recently volunteered at the BBBS Holiday curbside event, where he could see his Little Brothers. They were excited to see one another and connect in person. Ridge helped Littles from the agency select holiday toys for themselves and others. Overall, Ridge is a great volunteer and motivated student athlete. He offers excellent advice to his Little Brothers. His positive attitude and “can do” mentality keep his Little Brothers set on the right track. Ridge sees the opportunity that playing sports and excelling in school offer toward his future, and he encourages Michael and Leo to follow in his footsteps.