Boxer wants to give kids a fighting chance at college

By J. Andrew Curliss
Dispatch Staff Reporter

If James “Buster” Douglas has his way, urban youths from across Ohio will get the opportunity to stay overnight on a college campus in the hope that one day they will stay longer.

Douglas, a Columbus native and former world heavyweight boxing champion, said yesterday that he will match donations from community organizations and businesses willing to sponsor a program that sends youths to Ohio State University during the week of the Capital City Classic VI.

The cost for each student is $85.

The program, called Community Quarterbacking, means children in grades eight through 10 will have the chance to attend seminars and workshops at OSU. The workshops cover college-preparatory courses, university admissions and tips for taking entrance exams.

“This is something that truly means a lot to me,” said Douglas, who appeared publicly for the first time since he was hospitalized and diagnosed with diabetes a month ago. “It’s giving the kids a chance to get structure as a collegiate (student). It will give them the desire to find themselves in that situation again.”

Douglas then left Columbus for Dayton to promote the program.

The Martin Performing & Cultural Arts Complex and the Columbus Public Schools already have selected about 100 central Ohio youths for the program. Officials said yesterday they can accommodate up to 500 students from across Ohio.

The youths who are selected must meet a list of criteria set forth by the King Arts Complex, sponsor of the Classic.

They must:
- Live in subsidized housing or receive money from a government-sponsored program.
- Have at least a C average in the past year of school.
- Have a 95 percent attendance rate for the past two years of school.
- Be an active church member.
- Participate in at least one activity not related to school.
- This is to help get to college those students who have shown the potential or possess the potential to get there,” said John Pace, director of development and marketing for the complex.

In the past, students — called Junior Quarterbacks — attended the program at the King Arts Complex but did not stay overnight. This year, the students will spend Aug. 26-27 at OSU.

They will attend the workshops on the first day, stay overnight in a college dormitory and attend the City Classic football game between Central State University and Knoxville College the following day.

The Classic is a weekend series of events beginning Aug. 22 that includes cultural activities and the football game.

James “Buster” Douglas, shortly after a press conference, has announced his sponsorship of the Community Quarterbacking program.