

Published July 23, 2010

## Around Annapolis: Camp teaches lessons through basketball

By DIANE M. REY, For The Capital

Toss in some basketball terms, and all of a sudden math problems are a lot more fun.

That's the revelation for a group of boys engaged in the first Anne Arundel All-Stars Academy running through July 29 at Annapolis Middle School.

Although the four "quarters" of their day allow plenty of time for fun and games, there's a serious side to the summer camp that kicked off July 6 at the school on Forest Drive: raising academic achievement for the 25 rising sixth-graders who signed up.

"We wanted boys who we call our 'bubble kids' - those that need just a little push to take them into 'proficient' or 'advanced' in their academic assessments," said Dana Denny, coordinator of compensatory education for Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

She said the basketball theme was an effective hook for boys, who often lag behind girls in test scores and motivation and thrive on healthy competition. Potential "players" had to write an essay on what it means to be a team player, and parents were required to attend two evening workshops to learn ways to support student achievement at home.

The local pilot program was developed in conjunction with LaMarr Darnell Shields, co-founder and president of the Urban Leadership Institute in Baltimore, and funded with \$30,000 in federal Title I grant



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Head coach Mark McCalpin gives student players a pep talk at the first Anne Arundel All-Stars Academy being held for rising sixth-grade boys at Annapolis Middle School. The pilot program combines basketball, academics and character education to give students a head start on middle school.

money. Students in the program came from six Annapolis elementary schools: Annapolis, Germantown, Georgetown East, Tyler Heights, Mills Parole and Eastport.

"The fundamentals of basketball are just like life. What's a simple fundamental we have to do in school?" Head Coach Mark McCalpin asked students as they gathered in the gym at the start of a recent session. Students arrived each day wearing basketball jerseys marked with the number 21 - the year they should graduate from college.

The question-and-answer session equated the practice and preparation required for success on the court to success in school and in later life. Afterward, students broke into groups for a team building exercise. They linked hands and wriggled their bodies in and out of a hula hoop, passing it around the circle. With each try, they got a little faster.

Following another group session on motivation, players headed to classrooms to practice math skills with graphic calculators they got to take home. They also did a writing exercise based on quotes by basketball heroes, such as Michael Jordan and the late John Wooden.

Another goal of the program is to create mentoring relationships between the male teachers or coaches and players that will carry on throughout the tricky middle school years.

Twin brothers Colin and Dan Varn are serving as assistant coaches on the Annapolis High basketball team. The "twin towers," both well over six feet tall, give the younger boys role models to look up to. Bill Clapper, men's basketball head coach at Penn State's Altoona campus, was among several motivational speakers who came out. His brother, Bradley Clapper, a fifth-grade teacher at Brooklyn Park Elementary, is serving as a coach for the All Stars Academy.

School officials, who hope to expand the program in future years, said they've seen the student players' confidence rise - and so far, no one has dropped out or gotten "benched."

A fender-bender in his first day on the job could have brought Riley Hansen down. Instead, the incident inspired the college student to launch a project to help others in need.

A 2008 graduate of St. Mary's High School, Riley had just finished his first year at University of Maryland Baltimore County when he started a summer internship at a financial services company in Owings Mills.

On his first day in early June, he pulled into the parking lot and hit the back of another car. The accident cost him \$1,300. "It put me in a funk the whole entire week. It was like hanging over my head," he said later.

But instead of dwelling on the negative, Riley decided to focus on the plight of others. "There are people out there starving," he said. "I'm healthy, I didn't hurt anyone. I tried to look at the bigger picture ... it was an eye opener."

The result of his thinking is the first "PB and J Day" to benefit the Annapolis Light House shelter.

Riley invites the community to turn out from 3 to 6 p.m. Aug. 8 under a tent next to the parking lot at St. John Neumann Church, 620 North Bestgate Road, to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and pack lunches for the homeless.

Items requested for donation are: whole wheat bread, peanut butter and jelly, sandwich and storage bags, applesauce cups, carrot and celery sticks, fruit cups and fruit rolls, nuts, raisins and trail mix, graham crackers, pudding cups, string cheese, granola bars, juice and water, brown paper bags and cash donations.

"I've never done anything like this in my life," Riley said. "I'm just doing what should be done. A lot of people think of these great ideas, but they never take action," he said.

For more information, contact Riley at [hansen1@umbc.edu](mailto:hansen1@umbc.edu).

Congratulations to all the swimmers, coaches and parents who participated in the ninth annual Bay Ridge Marlons Swim-a-Thon. The 24-hour event kicked off last Saturday at the Bay Ridge pool, drawing 124 swimmers who swam an amazing 16,500 laps (over 275 miles) to raise \$11,000 for cancer research.