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Subject: DJJ Media

Please read and share some of this good DJJ News!

Thank you.

DJJ featured in this Sunday's Time and Democrat

http://thetandd.com/lifestyles/orangeburgers/basketball-puts-juveniles-at-djj-on-the-run-to-be/article_687ae8b6-c249-5cca-b4b2-927321a2a098.html

Basketball puts juveniles at DJJ on the run to be winners

COLUMBIA -- Twelve young men from behind the fence at the S.C. Department of Juvenile Justice's secure facility are gathered in a tight circle, speaking in hushed tones of a plan they do not want overheard.

Their eyes are pierced and focused as they gauge the chance of success. This is it, their time. The best five against the other groups top five in a dance of strength, grace and willpower.

A DJJ employee observes carefully, but at a distance, nods, it is about to go down, or more precisely, up.

The ball is thrown in the air as a jump ball. The basketball game begins, but it is more than just a game to DJJ's juveniles.

DJJ's School District's Birchwood Bulldogs are continuing to learn, rehabilitate and maybe become closer to being part of South Carolina's community.

For many children, playing sports is a natural and safe environment to learn teamwork, success, failure, humility and compassion. Lessons learned on a gridiron, hardwood or a clay diamond resonate with many as they grow into adulthood. They help define and in many ways become a natural common bonding area with their own children as they pass down many lessons learned growing up. But those opportunities with sports are harder to find.

Playing youth sports in today's society in many ways is a luxury of time and money for parents to overcome. The sandlot era of pickup baseball or football is lost in a Norman Rockwell-tinted lens of the past. The hard courts of tennis and basketball are harder to find, and if found is it safe to allow youth to break on their own to play? For most of us the answer is usually no.

What is left? Club and travel teams have good coaching, a safe place to play, but often add up to hundreds if not thousands of dollars.

DJJ and its Birchwood School District are finding a way to allow juveniles to make split-second decisions on the run in sports. As in life, each decision affects all those around them working together for a common goal.

For many this may be a first, to individually make decisions for the good of others and team. To learn, compete and experience the lessons of wins and losses.

Some of these young people were star athletes before something went wrong in their lives and they ended up at DJJ. Somehow, somewhere they (like most of us) disappointed someone with decisions or actions.

The juveniles are here for a reason. DJJ is to rehabilitate and help bring the juvenile to the point where he or she can be bought back into their community as a valued and productive member. Sports is part of balance that DJJ works toward: mind, body and spirit of the juvenile.

The Birchwood School District works to prepare students for GED testing, high school diplomas, professional vocational certification and even for some a head start with college credits. It has DJJ chaplains for juveniles, and time and space afforded for religious service.

For body, DJJ has a physical education curriculum to assist ensuring a sound body and a chance for mind, body and spirit balance.

A class spent learning about basketball, football or baseball is a chance to learn and think as a unit. To leave any dispute, clique or affiliation behind and be one. It also gives the juveniles a chance to dream and work toward a third or fourth chance.

"I was good at football once, really good. I want to work hard to get myself right and maybe have a chance to play in college. Part of it is doing well in school here and now," said Malik S., 17, of Horry County.

The chance of playing a sport like basketball at DJJ is not given to the juveniles. It must be earned. Just as with any other high school team, the first requirement is good grades. The students all must maintain a high standard academically, but also in behavior. Only juveniles on the highest side of compliance and safety are permitted to play against the public teams bought in.

"Over my several years as the basketball coach at DJJ, I have seen the best of sportsmanship from our juveniles as well as the teams from the church leagues we play in," said Raymond "Duck" Harrison, an activity therapist

at DJJ and volunteer head basketball head coach. "On the court, they all work for each other and I believe they are better off the court and at DJJ because of it."

"I played at a high level of football for S.C. State and those memories of playing on a team with a school name on the front is something I treasure to this day. I am proud to help these kids make those kind of memories, said Harrison, an all-American football player in college in Orangeburg.

The DJJ basketball team wins much more than it loses. But the lessons playing teams from other communities help show they are more alike than it seems and continuing to work hard at Birchwood and DJJ can help bring them back into the community and stay there.

Sports and competition are a common language and understanding for youth moving into adulthood. Schoolyard dreams of one day playing big-time college ball or pro sports are shared by many millions of youth. Only a few percent ever play at the highest level of either.

For most people the memories, and dreaming in hope, of competing in sports at the highest level, whether little league or in the major leagues, helped drive and focus. Now juveniles at DJJ can have some of that hope too -- plus some of the pride of playing for the name on the front of the jersey. DJJ Birchwood Bulldogs.

Very Respectfully,

Patrick Montgomery

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