



NetGain raises over \$200,000 annually to support high school basketball

NetGain: Keeping Basketball Alive

By Tom Kertes

NEW YORK, March 30, 2006 -- NetGain is the most aptly named -- not to mention one of the most important -- tournaments the New York Knicks are involved with. And that's because the net gain is enormous -- and it profoundly changes the lives of thousands of kids every year.

It all starts with the little-known, and basically bordering-on-the-unbelievable, fact that an outrageous number of New York City public high schools do not have their own gym. "It is very simple -- and very sad," Eleanor Roosevelt High coach Jim Epstein says. "It is the result of the recent movement toward smaller schools -- there's simply no room -- and the absurd de-prioritizing of exercise, fitness, and physical education. Fact is, if it wasn't for these guys, we would have no basketball team."



Participants of the Net Gain Tournament
MSG Photos

"These guys" are fundraising specialist non-profits Youth I.N.C. and Urban Dove which, partnering with Basketball City and the Knicks, came up with a solution. "Eight years ago I was an English and History teacher, as well as basketball coach, at one of the schools in need, the Manhattan Village Academy," Urban Dove founder Jai Nanda recalls. "And I said to myself, 'this is crazy.' Then it came to me: why not raise corporate funds to correct what has become an unacceptable situation? These smaller model schools -- the kids, the teachers, the principals -- all WANT a basketball team but they can't afford to rent courts. They don't have room in their own buildings -- they are mostly located in places that were never meant to be schools -- and renting courts is impossible on the budgets they have. So NetGain annually raises somewhere over \$200,000 in order to rent courts for 16 New York City public schools at Basketball City."

The Knicks support the tournament annually by making Madison Square Garden available for student participants of NetGain and event sponsors to play at half time of a Knicks game on April 14, 2006. The Knicks also sent a legion of alumni and the Knicks Street Team to support the tournament including **John Starks, Earl "the Pearl" Monroe, Kenny Walker, Buck Williams, Rod Strickland, Kym Hampton, Mel Davis** as well as the Knicks City Dancers and the Knicks Groove Truck.

Basketball City is a gorgeous, six-court facility adjacent to Chelsea Piers with the caliber of hardwood you'll rarely find outside of Madison Square Garden. "We donate over 500 hours of additional court time every season to these 16 schools, both for games AND practices," Basketball City Founder and President Bruce Radler says. "We have been a great success and it's very important to us to give back to the community, especially when it comes to kids." Basketball City, which also donates college scholarships and runs a host of other after school activities, is currently looking to expand into Atlanta, Toronto, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco. "We are absolutely looking forward to having the same type of outreach and community involvement in those cities as well," Radler says.

In addition to its profoundly practical helping hand, Basketball City appears to have the magic touch as well. "Of the 29 teams playing here last season --16 boys and 13 girls' teams -- 11 made the playoffs," smiles Radler. No wonder there's an endless waiting list of schools in need. "This place, what can I say, it's become a real home court for us," says Epstein, nearly overcome with emotion.

Beacon School, an amazing success story, has actually moved up from Division B to Manhattan's Division A -- gaining a chance to face off against playoff superpowers such as Lincoln, Grady, Curtis, and Cardozo --

while making their home at Basketball City. "NetGain means everything to myself and the kids who have played for me for the past seven years," coach John Sarci says. "Jay knew about our situation -- we were going broke renting space and were about to go out of the basketball "business" altogether -- and gave us a call. Without this we'd have no team, period. Instead, we made the playoffs every year we've been here." In 2003, 47th ranked Beacon beat the No. 16 team in the playoffs on the road, creating a statewide sensation.

In NetGain, the 8-9 men and women from the corporate sponsors play on the same teams with 4-5 high school kids, with at least one student on the court at all times. "This is one tournament where winning is not the number one thing," Nanda told the kids. "You might play five minutes, you might play the whole game. But tonight, developing relationships is most important."

Which does not mean that those relationships are just for tonight. "The donors are basically a "Who's Who" of Wall Street," says Nanda. "It's a lot of guys who played basketball as kids themselves and know how important after school sports can be in a kid's life. They want to help tonight and beyond. Dozens of friendships, internships and even careers have already been formed here."

Beacon's beaming 6-2 sophomore guard Calvin Johnson feels "tonight is way cool for a number of reasons. For one thing, I get a chance express my appreciation to the people who give us a chance to play. For another, if I don't make the NBA, I'd like to have a career in business. And I've already met some amazing people here who gave me their cards and said I could call them any time to talk."

"I've had experience teaching several dozens of kids who would not have been motivated to attend school at all if it wasn't for basketball," adds Sarci. "They just would not have gotten up in the morning, case closed. Now, many of them made a real success of themselves career-wise. So the impact is immeasurable."

Clearly, NetGain is about far more than "just" basketball. Studies consistently show that kids involved in after-school athletics test better, live better, become superior students -- as well as far more successful people later in life. And if that wasn't enough, "Playing high school sports in a once-in-a-lifetime thing," says Nanda. "Everybody should have those memories. Everybody should have an opportunity to do it, no matter what their income and no matter what neighborhood they happen to grow up in or what school they go to."

http://www.nba.com/knicks/community/netgain_060330.html