

Lessons first, then sports Academics lead off at ROC E6 camp for inner-city kids

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Jaivion Jones exhibits wisdom beyond his years.

Jaivion, 10, a fifth-grader at the Franklin Montessori School who loves playing football, baseball and lacrosse as well as wrestling, knows that it takes more than his athletic ability to succeed in life.

Arkee Allen, founder of the ROC E6 Summer Camp, stressed the point to Jaivion during the six-week camp this summer.

"It's nice to have a balance between academics and sports. It's very important (to maintain my academics) because while I can go a long way in sports, academics will take me farther," said Jaivion, who is one of 106 campers in grades 3-8 who attended the sessions that introduce city kids to sports such as lacrosse, wrestling, baseball and softball while boosting their academic skills.

Jaivion values an education as much as pursuing a professional sports career, but sports like his are the norm rather than the exception at the camp.

Allen founded the camp, which costs \$30 per person, to give inner-city youths the opportunity to raise their grades and get prepared for the future while having fun playing sports.



Jaivion

Each camper goes through an intense academic session, including math, English and ethics lessons during the morning portion. The

afternoons belong solely to sports, with the boys playing baseball, lacrosse and wrestling and the girls learning lacrosse, softball and soccer. All campers must participate in all activities if they want to attend.

"We lay the path for the child; the child doesn't lay down the path that they want to go down," said Allen, an eighth-grade math teacher at



Justin Hillery, 17, of Brighton helps camper Caleb Vega, 9, of Rochester with writing at the ROC E6 summer camp in the city. One hundred and six youths grades 3 through 8 attend the camp.

KATHARINE SIDELNIK staff photographer

East High School.

"Some kids only came to play one sport, as if they're able to choose their own path. If you only play one sport, you miss the point of the camp of opening your mind to other



Allen

things. You have to open your mind to other things because once you do you get used to opening your mind to new things all the time."

On a sunny Tuesday afternoon, Allen and the more than 35 staffers sat down with the students to tackle a heavy issue: the use of a racial slur in society that begins with the letter "n." The campers, who range in age from 8 to 13, are supposed to debate this topic in front of the rest of the camp.

Allen and the counselors make the groups argue for and

against the use of the word to get them thinking about stereotypes and how they affect their lives. For the predominantly African-American camp it is a serious issue, but one they feel comfortable addressing.



Robert

"It's a good idea to discuss it because if we don't, kids will just keep on using it and it could lead to trouble," said Robert Williams, 11, a seventh-grader at East High School.

"Now we debate using the word and it can change people's minds. It's unique for us to be doing this at this age."

That's the other goal of Allen's camp. Give the campers a unique summer experience while working to change their views of the world.

Arianna Thomas and her

twin sister, Brianna, attended their first camp at their mother's urging, but midway through the program they were noticing a change in their own attitudes, particularly Arianna, who one day wants to be a



Arianna

lawyer. "I have more confidence in myself from being out here," said Arianna, 11, a sixth-grader at the Rogers Middle School

in Irondequoit. "I used to feel down ... on myself and a little depressed because I thought we could never do anything that other people could do, but now I know that's not the case ... Everyone needs to believe they can play any sport and do anything they want in life if they don't give up."

Confidence inspired Byron Waddell to try out for the

camp's varsity lacrosse team, which plays at PAETEC Park during halftime of a Rochester Rattlers game. Byron, a fifth-grader at the Brooks Hill Elementary School in Fairport, never heard of lacrosse before coming to last year's camp and now he's one of the 24 best players.

"I was surprised to be on the varsity, being a new player, and I didn't think I played that well in tryouts, but the coaches believed in me and that feels really good," Byron said.

"Mr. Allen has given back to the community so that city people can have lacrosse sticks and the chance to play this game, and this camp inspires me to be the best I can."

Allen doesn't view himself as a role model. He just wants to do the best he can to ensure these children don't get left behind. "We want to challenge these students and open up new boundaries for them," Allen said.

"They will be able to say what they want to do and know how to go out there and accomplish their goals. Hopefully, by the end our kids will be leaders and will cause their friends to listen to them."

Jaivion is sad the camp is coming to an end, but he knows he's picked up valuable life lessons that will help him



Byron

one day reach his goals, whether he becomes a lawyer, doctor or quarterback of the Buffalo Bills.

"My first year here I wasn't very good at academics but this year, with lots of studying and hard work, I'm on top of my class," Jaivion said. "Someday I want to become known and famous and one day all of this is going to come back to help me in my life. I'm going to be real happy I was here because I feel I can do whatever I want to do with my life." □

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