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SPORTING CONFIDENCE

Coaches, volunteers mentor kids in hopes of teaching life skills

**DENIS
PEREZ-BRAVO**

Mentoring is the most important aspect of the Richmond Police Activities League's mission.

"Mentoring is the foundation of what we do," RPAL program coordinator Brandon Evans said.

All of RPAL's programs have a 1-on-1 or group mentoring component built into their curriculum.

Over the years, the sports programs have been instrumental in



Brandon Evans

RPAL's efforts in developing youth into well-rounded people.

"It's more than just about sports, it's about developing the whole child," Evans said.

Apart from allowing a student to showcase their athletic skills, the sports programs at RPAL teach the students life skills and discipline while exposing them to coaching and role mod-

els, he said.

"They are more than just athletes," he said.

RPAL serves high risk populations that are often seen as athletes first rather than young adults.

Coaches and trainers tackle that prejudice by encouraging a student-athlete mindset that can lead to better habits in the youth.

This year, RPAL will serve more than 1,000 youth with the opportunity to develop.

"Sports is not the end

goal," Evans said.

Through their participation in the various sports programs, Evans knows that some of the youth will engage in other programs that are not related to sports.

In those programs he knows that they will be challenged in other ways, but the skills they learned in their respective sports will help them succeed.

"The goal is to give them resources and opportunities," he said.

Flag football sharpens young minds

BY DENIS
PEREZ-BRAVO

Hundreds of kids come together at Nicholl Park on Wednesdays from 5 to 7 p.m. to play flag football as part of the San Francisco 49ers Prep Football program partnership with RPAL and other local programs.

Kaden Whitley, 12, has been participating in the program for three years.

"It keeps my brain moving and thinking more," he said.

Flag football has helped

him think more and



Photo by Denis Perez-Bravo

strategize his moves on the field and outside of it, like math where he has to critically think about what he is doing, he said.

On the field, football has taught him about respect and calmness.

"Football disciplines you to respect your teammates and other

people. When you play against other people you have to stay calm. Even when you mess up," Whitley said.

Boxing Classes Open, Teaches Fundamentals

BY DENIS
PEREZ-BRAVO

Alex Coffin-Lennear, 35, answered some questions about his role as boxing director, a position he started in this year.



Q&A

Q: How do you see yourself relating to the

kids?

A: I can share with them what I have done. And what I would have done with a facility like this. I hope to talk their language and about music too. Music is its own language. I know I am the boxing coach but music was my first passion.

Q: What should kids expect who join?

A: For the most part we will build the kids from

the ground up. From going over there stance to footwork and getting their endurance up. Once those techniques are up to speed then we will get to boxing and using their hand.

Q: When are classes available?

A: I am here from Tuesday to Friday. We have two group of kids. A group that comes at 4 p.m. and the other group starts at 5 p.m.



Photo by Denis Perez-Bravo



LATE NIGHT BASKETBALL: Train your body, mind

BY JOSHUA BARR

Young athletes are invited to sharpen their basketball abilities while also receiving mentoring and guidance during the Workshops Before Jumpshots athletic training program every Friday night from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the RPAL Gym.

"We are bringing so many different cultures together using basketball as a platform for guys who probably wouldn't have interacted with each other," Program Liaison coach Sefa Sunia said.

Sunia has been directing the program for the last three years. The program's foundation is based on promoting athleticism and professionalism over bad decisions.

"It allows the guys a place to go where they're out of trouble. They are in a safe and

positive environment," he said.

Athletes work out their bodies with intense drills and scrimmages. To begin the students are split into groups for drills. Ranging from conditioning, ball handling, finishing and other fundamentals of the game. Once those drills conclude teams are assembled and the scrimmages begin. It is in these games that the competitive energy is cranked to a maximum. Participants get a chance to play across age groups and truly challenge themselves.

But before competitive play begins, young athletes are challenged with workshops and ideas before practice begins. These workshop topics range from college prep, interview preparation and training with HR specialists to emotional develop-

ment.

"We show the guys how to dress for interviews, questions to look for, how to complete a resume and how to complete a job application," Sunia said.

The Workshop Before Jumpshot program hopes to go beyond the court and help young athletes achieve more.

"There are lots of opportunities for them to get educated in things like coding or cybersecurity. Things that don't need a four year degree, but instead certifies." Sunia said.

Promoting different life paths that lead to successful lives can be integrated into coaching, and Sunia hopes to continue mentoring through sports.

"There are activities that we do all the time throughout the program where we have

our guys take a timeout to become a bit more introspective. Activities that kind of help them identify who they really are as people," Sunia said.

Coaches and staff work with the young men to manage their anger, fears and frustrations while teaching them how to set goals and incite self-confidence.

And with three years of strong work ethic being instilled into hundreds of young athletes, Sunia knows that it will make a difference.

"This can help close divides whether they are racial or social, and build positive relationships. This has the power to change the community from within for the next generation. It is a small pebble, but the ripples can be felt for years to come," Sunia said.