

Brooklyn family

BROOKLYN'S BEST GUIDE FOR PARENTS

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FREE

EDUCATION

In the Real World, It's Books Before Basketball

Reading Goes Along With Good Moves

By Christy Goodman

This summer, the courts in Coffey Park will be overflowing with young storybook stars.

The third annual "Books and Basketball" program, offered by Red Hook Rise and Literacy, Inc., is back at the blacktop on Richards Street, between Pioneer and Kings Streets for girls and boys ages 8 to 11.

"We no longer want to serve them a dream of playing basketball. To realistically help them meet their goals we incorporate reading," said Earl Hall, co-founder of Red Hook Rise, a sports and community organization established in 1994 at 481 Van Brunt Street. "It is books before basketball in the real world."

Every Saturday at 11 a.m., girls and boys between the ages of 8 and 11 gather on the court and read.

"We have a designated area with an education center for them to read as a team or as individuals or we will have a special guest reader come down and read to the kids," said Hall, who started Red Hook

Rise with his brother, Ray, to bring more safe educational and recreational programs to their neighborhood.

"You may be able to dribble, shoot, pass and even slam dunk, but you won't be a winner if you aren't a dedicated reader," said Borough President Marty Markowitz, who has been a guest reader in the past.

"Someday you won't be able to nail a three-pointer, but you'll never be too old to read," he encouraged. "It is the sport that'll last a lifetime."

Children are welcome to bring their own books or can use books donated to the program by Literacy, Inc.

"We do community organizing, using literacy as a focus, in order to bring the community together to make sure the folks in the community know that literacy is important to our children," said Lori Bethea, a team leader for Literacy, Inc. "If we all get together to support the children, they will become better readers and they will read more often."

Even if kids come to basketball late, they must read before they hit the courts.

"We emphasize they must take time out to read," said Hall, who has local teens, many of which have aged out of the Red Hook Rise programs, coming to the courts to assist in the program.

"The former kids from Red Hook Rise learn the importance of giving back to the program," he said.

In addition to keeping the kids off the streets and giving them something to do in the summer, they also stay sharp when school is out, said Bethea.

The ending celebration for the Books and Basketball program will be on August 9 to acknowledge the kids and their commitment to the reading program. The kids receive books and other incentives to keep them reading.

Last year's celebration featured former New York Knick Tom Hoover and former Boston Celtic Nate 'Tiny' Archibald.

Hall is also getting the parents involved by being reading coaches and helping out on the sidelines.

For more information, go online to red-hookrise.org or call (718) 243-2933.