
Mayor's Night Hoops in Kansas City, Missouri¹

Presenter:

Nathaniel O. Wilkins,² Superintendent of Recreation

With all of the problems and all of the challenges our children are facing today, if you were in their shoes, could you weave your way through, and become successful like you are today?

Background

In 1991 Kansas City, Missouri (population 434,829) Mayor Emmanuel Cleaver called a summit of city leaders to develop a plan to combat the challenges of limited recreation and employment opportunities for youth ages 14-25. The Mayor had attended the 1991 Mayor's Urban Summit where discussions were held about midnight basketball programs that had been instituted around the country. Mayor Cleaver felt that midnight basketball could be as successful in Kansas City as in Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, and Atlanta. Instead, the Recreation Division of the Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department took the lead in developing Kansas City Business Hoops, the name emphasizing the collaborative funding relationship with businesses which was necessary to initiate the program. Eventually the name was changed to the Mayor's Night Hoops Program.

Ollie Gates, President of the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners; Terry Dopson, Director of the Department; and Nathaniel Wilkins, the Superintendent of Recreation, and his staff, all helped to develop the program concept. Together they solicited support from the Kansas City School District, Kansas City Police Department, the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation and Affiliated Trusts, Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), Dubuque Foods, Price Chopper, KPRS Radio Station, Wilson Chapman Advertising, Wings and Things, and others.

Program

During summer 1992, the Mayor suggested that the program operate Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 p.m. until 1 a.m. The program used Central High School, a newly constructed school district facility which was leased to the parks and recreation department to inaugurate the program.

The program operated from June through mid-August. The foundation of the program was deeply rooted in the old African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." Individuals and teams were recruited from area facilities, shopping malls and local basketball courts. Teams were registered through the AAU to ensure participant insurance coverage. Arrangements were made with the police department to use off-duty officers to patrol the parking lot and facilities to ward off any signs of trouble. Coaches were recruited from area parents and school organizations.

The season began and ended in a festive manner with contests such as three-point shootouts, slam dunk, and beat-the-clock contests. Area drill teams were asked to provide entertainment. At the closing banquet, participants were recognized with trophies and certificates of accomplishment.

The program recruited close to 200 participants and consisted of 16 teams (all male). By the summer of 1993 the Mayor's Night Hoops program grew to 480 participants playing on 48 teams including 6

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female teams. The program provided learning opportunities, career exposure, and skill development. During 1993 volleyball was added, and the program was offered at three additional sites around the city: Don Bosco Youth Center, Central High School and Penn Valley Community College. Approximately 880 players were involved, with spectators numbering approximately 3,000. Spectators sometimes had to be turned away. Initially, spectators were charged \$1 to participate in the program, but soon the leaders realized that the spectators were looking for some place to go, too! The building can provide a safe haven for parents, friends, and neighbors as well as for the players.

In 1994 the program expanded to include youth ages 10-14, Wednesdays through Fridays from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. and on Saturday mornings. This was done since many older youth who participate in negative activities learned these behavior patterns when they were younger.

More than Just Basketball

An educational component was included in the development of the midnight basketball program. Participants learn about jobs, interviewing, interpersonal communication skills, HIV/AIDS, and drugs. While youth initially come to Night Hoops to play basketball, the education component gives them a chance to develop other skills. The classes expose participants to opportunities for personal development, motivational training, and entrepreneurial skills which can assist in developing self-worth and inner-strength (see Exhibit 26A). Educational sessions are kept to a maximum of one-half hour, since it is hard to motivate interest beyond that period of time.

According to Nathaniel Wilkins, Superintendent of Recreation:

The program shows that recreation is a productive way of using city dollars and corporate support to benefit, involve, and create opportunities for our citizens. It is important to

bring our youth together with strong adult support to create a 'rite of passage' opportunity and to help them to understand and share adult responsibilities. We must take the time to instill values into young people, such as learning proper health and drug and alcohol-free lifestyles, and provide safe environments that are a positive alternative to gangs, drugs and violence. Night Hoops redirects frustrated energies in a positive manner. We are not just sitting back and hoping for a good summer. We are making it happen.

The goals of the program are:

- (1) to develop a recreation program that utilizes basketball as a centerpiece or attractive incentive to achieve broader educational and entrepreneurial goals for youth;
- (2) to raise the social consciousness of private businesses and the public sector concerning their need to be involved with a neglected segment of the population;
- (3) to develop collaborative relationships;
- (4) to develop a network of support services which would enhance and positively impact on participants' quality of life; and
- (5) to develop opportunities for participants to train and develop skills in timekeeping, scorekeeping, and officiating.

Following the Rules

If a participant gets in trouble during a game, he or she is not necessarily kicked out of the facility. Participants are asked to leave only if they refuse to follow the rules and regulations. According to Wilkins:

It is easy to kick someone out. It takes some work to sit down with somebody and say, 'What's going on, why did you do that?' During the championship game, this kid gets angry; one point separates his team from the championship,

Exhibit 26A

Food for Thought

When you get what you want in your struggles for self, and the world makes you king or queen for a day,
Just go to the mirror and look at yourself, and see what the mirror has to say.
Whether it is your father, mother, sister, brother in life whose judgment upon you is passed.
The person whose verdict counts most in your life is the one staring back in the glass.
You may fool the world down through the pathways of life, and get pats on the back as you pass.
But your only rewards will be heartaches and tears if you cheat the person in the glass.
...Don't cheat yourself.

and this guy gets fouled, but the referee misses the call. The player takes the ball and kicks it up in the air. We stopped the game and said, 'Hey, look, that's not necessary.' The player got angry, said a lot of choice words and left. Do you think he's going to be back in our program? Probably. But the next time what we will do is try to coach him to handle the situation better.

Wilkins also recounts a particular incident that illustrates the program's stance about teaching personal responsibility:

One time we had a fight in the stands between some young people. And one of our people, who is on a police cooperative went up into the stands and said to all the group who were involved, 'All rise.' They all got up and were escorted outside, where he began to counsel them. The ones that didn't want to listen were asked to leave. People want to know what the rules are and what is expected; if you allow them to do the wrong thing, don't blame them. It is up to the program to provide guidance and set limits.

The program allows any person to enroll. When individuals become part of the program, they must attend and take part in the educational sessions; roll is called, but allowances are made for participants who have work obligations.

Police currently monitor the parking lot and enforce a security check to insure that people are not bringing weapons into the building. To help with security in the future, the program is considering creating an ID-card system although cost may be an inhibiting factor. This system would make it possible to monitor attendance and control who enters the building.

Staffing

The program is staffed by independent contractors who act as the program manager, commissioner, facility manager, chief of security, trainer, and assigner of officials. These contractors report to the recreation superintendent or his designee. In addition, volunteers are recruited as coaches. An advisory board is being formed to assist with fundraising and long-range planning.

Marketing

The mayor's office has helped promote the program with press conferences and news releases. Flyers are distributed throughout the community as well as in all community centers. The *Kansas City Star* has

written about the program and profiled several participants. The local media have carried the opening gala as a lead story.

The program promotion effort was enhanced in 1993 by a promotion offered by Dubuque Foods and Price Chopper which provided a pair of quality tennis shoes to the program for every 50 pounds of hot dogs purchased at Price Chopper Stores during the months of February through May. Marketing of the program was also done through the use of a promotional video developed in-house by department staff. The video won an award for the best short story on a recreation program from National Recreation and Parks Association. Local radio station KPRS supports the program with a DJ as well as public service announcements. Word-of-mouth and personal contacts are also important for attracting participants.

Financing and Resource Acquisition

Presently, youth pay no fees for participating in the program. Major costs are covered by the parks and recreation operating budget; a donation from the Community Foundation and Affiliated Trust (\$10,000); a grant from the State Department of Public Safety (\$10,000); and a contribution from Don Bosco Youth Center (\$5,000). The current program budget is \$100,000; the allocation of that budget is shown in Exhibit 26B.

Measurement of Program Outcomes

The following factors are monitored throughout the program:

- (a) the number of program participants;
- (b) level of criminal activity in the areas surrounding program sites;
- (c) the impact of the educational component;
- (d) the number of businesses expressing interest in the program;
- (e) the success ratio of job placements and referrals; and
- (f) the number of young men and women in attendance at workshop sessions.

A review of juvenile apprehensions in the Central and East Patrol Divisions indicated a 25% decline during July 1993 compared to July 1992. The biggest declines were in violent crimes and property-related offenses. These divisions are the major areas in which the Night Hoops program operates.

One spin-off of the program has been the opportunity for some of the players to be trained as referees. Not only are they able to officiate during the times they are working Night Hoops, but they

Exhibit 26B**Mayor's Night Hoops Budget Allocation for 1994**

Security	\$ 29,151
Site Staff	31,672
Management Staff	17,955
Uniforms	8,241
Equipment Rental	2,480
AAU Fees	4,975
Trophies/Awards	2,041
Banquet Costs	2,200
Miscellaneous Expenses	<u>1,285</u>
Total	\$100,000

also have opportunities to officiate in other leagues as well.

In 1995 the Mayor's Urban Symposium and Tournament (MUST) was held in Kansas City. It provided an opportunity for community and political leaders to interact and exchange ideas on urban issues and concerns. MUST is the first national program to combine urban concerns and a national hoops tournament, with entrepreneurial training.