

New Haven Register

Yale Camp Continues to Give Back

By Colin Ward-Henninger, Special to the Register

August 6, 2008

For the 13th straight year, Yale University enlisted the help of its athletes as members of the New Haven community participated in the National Youth Sports Program.

The NYSP, which ran from June 30 until its closing ceremonies on Friday, takes an incredible amount of resources because it is free for the participants.

Any child, age 9-16, can become a part of the five-week program at no cost. Yale even teamed up with a local bus company this year to provide transportation to and from the facilities for those that needed it. The only stipulation is that each child that signs up must participate in all five weeks of the program.

Over the course of the program, the children were divided into age groups, with each group given the name of a different state, such as Texas or Connecticut.

Each group rotated between 10 different activities over the course of each day. Most were athletic activities such as crew, football, basketball, volleyball, swimming, dance, and softball.

The children also had informational sessions in subjects such as health and nutrition, math and science, and drug and alcohol awareness.

“The idea was to give the kids access to activities they normally wouldn’t be exposed to,” said Jordan Skolnick, the Project Administrator.

In order to manage 250-300 kids a day, Yale enlisted the help of its athletes, members of the New Haven community, and athletes from other local colleges. While most of the Yale athletes were counselors in charge of a single group, incoming senior and All-Ivy League offensive tackle Darius Dale had a special job.

Dale is a President Public Service Fellow who was appointed to help out at the NYSP by the Office of New Haven State Affairs.

In addition to being Skolnick’s right-hand man, Dale went from activity to activity making sure that everything was running smoothly. He was also in charge of the General Store, where the kids could redeem their “NYSP Bucks” for prizes. The kids earned them for various reasons, including good sportsmanship and helping out the counselors. They could either redeem them immediately for a small gift or save them for a larger prize.

“The kids really buy into it,” said Dale, “Hopefully it can teach them the value of saving up their money.”

The program occasionally deviated from its 10-activity schedule for special events such as a talent/fashion show, which allowed 30 participants to showcase their skills in front of roughly 200 spectators at the John J. Lee Amphitheater on the Yale campus.

“The kids were unbelievably excited,” said Skolnick, “They wouldn’t stop talking about it and going over their routines.”

The NYSP concluded with a carnival at the fields across from the Yale Bowl. There were activities set up for the campers such as an inflatable water slide, an obstacle course, and a dizzy-bat relay race.

Parents were invited to join and grilled hot dogs and hamburgers were provided. At the conclusion of the day, the counselors presented awards, with the winner of the male and female Camper of the Year both receiving a brand new bicycle.

Awards were also handed out for Participant of the Year in each individual sport, and every participant received a complimentary T-shirt and a

2008 season pass for free admission to Yale football games.

“I think it’s great to be able to provide these kids with opportunities they wouldn’t otherwise have,” said Skolnick.

Ward-Henninger is an intern for the Register.