

# Analyst Creates 'Hoops & Leaders,' a Basketball Camp Providing Mentoring for Teens

By Amber Katz

Aaron Dworkin is passionate about community-building through sports. "Sporting events are a rare circumstance under which several socio-economic groups gather in the same place," explained Aaron, an Associate Analyst in the Public Finance Group. [Former U.S. Senator and basketball star] Bill Bradley's book, "Values of the Game" initially inspired him. "It read like a curriculum for a basketball program, which I realized I could easily turn into a camp," recalled Aaron. He convinced the New York City Parks Department to donate a recreation center for the camp by writing a proposal and a business plan. The camp takes place seven nights over a two-week span from 5:30 pm to 9:30 pm.

Aaron volunteered as a Big Brother a few years ago and learned about a lengthy waiting list of teenage boys requesting a mentor. Many are paired with a Big Sister, which is not ideal, as most boys wish to spend time with male role models. Aaron appealed to approximately 280 mentors and teens since the program's inception five years ago by using

basketball as a hook. Mentors (including 11 from Moody's) can arrive at camp at 6:30 pm to allow for work commitments.

"Few campers are great at basketball," explained Aaron.

"Several organizations exist for kids who excel in sports, academics, and music. There are also numerous programs for kids with challenges. But average stu-

dents who do their homework, yet don't make honor roll; who like sports, yet aren't on a team, are overlooked. Our kids fall into this category."

A typical "camp day" begins with basketball practice for the campers. Then, the group enjoys a catered dinner. After an ice-breaking activity, Aaron invites professionals whose work is related to basketball, yet not in a playing capacity, to come speak. "We've had Gus Johnson from CBS Sports and an NBA referee, to name a couple," Aaron said. He stresses the importance of a college education to fulfill career dreams by organizing a mini college fair annually, so campers can ask questions about the mentors' respective universities.

A game of basketball ensues. Four teams of varied members each time play on two courts simultaneously. Aaron then leads an educational activity. One example: everyone is divided into three groups, each representing the marketing departments at Adidas, Reebok, and Nike. Each team creates a sneaker and a slogan, then chooses a celebrity

to endorse it. The groups then present their products. "A lot of the mentors have MBAs and discuss similar exercises they did in business school," reported Aaron. "They explain that real employees at Nike are assigned things like this and that they can do it too! But they still have to pay attention in math class. We want the kids to learn about other sports-industry professions — just in case they don't make it into the NBA."

The camp season concludes with an awards banquet and a community service project. The campers bring their parents; mentors bring their girlfriends or wives. The campers give speeches about how the program has affected them. "It's very heartfelt," Aaron remarked. The mentors are surprised to gain as much from the program as the kids.

Spending an evening playing ball in a hot gym in the West Village provides a welcome break from corporate life. Most even volunteer as a Big Brother to one of the campers during the school year. ■



Some of Hoops & Leaders mentors from Moody's gather in front of the 99 Church Street office in New York: (l-r) Dennis Lam, Aaron Dworkin, Daniel Deutsche, Parsram Dhanraj, Salim Fields, James Birch, Brian Valentine. Not pictured: Michael Crumpler, Aubrey Dasque, David Huang and Chad John.

For more information about volunteering for Hoops & Leaders, contact Aaron Dworkin at 212.553.7294. For more info about Big Brothers Big Sisters, visit [www.bigsny.org](http://www.bigsny.org).