

## **2011 GymRat CHALLENGE**

### **Talent, Teamwork on Display in Championship Runs & Triple Crown Chase**

By STEVE AMEDIO

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ALBANY, N.Y. – The GymRat CHALLENGE AAU boys' basketball tournament has a well-deserved reputation as a stage for young players to emerge as stars, but the 2011 version of one of the nation's largest AAU events showed that talent is only one important ingredient in becoming a GymRat CHALLENGE Champion.

That contention was on display particularly in the upper-level age brackets where even the GymRat title winners at the 17-under, 16-under and 15-under age brackets conceded their common championship-game opponents likely had more individual standouts in three very talented Sports U teams that made a serious run at only the second TRIPLE CROWN championship in GymRat CHALLENGE history. Only once before had three teams from one program even reached the finals of the 15U, 16U, and 17U GymRat CHALLENGE Age Divisions when the NY Gauchos pulled off an unprecedented TRIPLE CROWN championship run in the 2000 event.

For Eddie Bright's Sports U program, the journey towards a GymRat CHALLENGE Triple Crown chase started five years ago when his then up-start program ended up on the daunting GymRat CHALLENGE event Waiting List which annually reaches 90+ teams. Like many, Eddie enlisted a lobbyist to try to help his team gain entry into the event field—NBA dunkmaster and backboard-breaking legend, Darryl Dawkins. "We get calls every year from people trying to lobby to get teams from the Waiting List into the event", commented event Executive Director, John Kmack. "NBA players—past and present, college coaches, agents, politicians, you name the sphere of influence and we've heard from it, but the call from Chocolate Thunder was the first we've ever received from the Planet Lovetron area code"

Eventually, Bright's group gained entry into the 15U field in the 2007 event (according to Kmack, not because of the call from Dawkins, although he appreciated Sir Slam's humor) and his teams have been on a steady climb since. "Eddie's worked very hard to build the RIGHT KIND OF PROGRAM from the ground up" says Kmack "We've dealt with many different programs and people over the past 14 years. From his coaching staffs to the talent level of the kids to the standard of professional behavior that's set for everyone in that program, Sports U is a FIRST-CLASS organization and clearly one of the best programs in the eastern United States. Although they didn't bring home one of the big trophies this year, what they accomplished here was VERY impressive. This should be a very proud time for everyone associated with Sports U. I couldn't have been more impressed with how those kids, coaches, and parents handled themselves on Sunday evening."

And, so it was in three talent-laden upper age bracket championship games played at the University at Albany's SEFCU Arena as team defense coupled with unselfish offensive philosophies enabled champions to emerge. In each case, it wasn't which team necessarily had the most-glimmering array of stars but perhaps those epitomized the collective values of on-court work that pays dividends in any game. Teamwork and discipline still has a role in AAU success, as upper-division champions Jersey Shore Warriors (17-under division), Rhode Island Hawks-Black (16-under) and New Heights NYC (15-under) can attest.

That was even the case for younger-level teams, competing in the GymRat for the first time in the event's 14-year history.

The addition of 14-under and 13-under divisions saw talented-laden programs from Connecticut Elite (14-under) and New Heights NYC (13-under) win GymRat CHALLENGE hardware. While both younger-division programs had arguably the best overall collection of talent at their respective levels, there was also agreement from both winning coaches that it took more than just individual skill levels to win here. It took a dedication to a team-oriented approach for the 14-under and 13-under champions as well.

That's not to say that the GymRat event, which brought a record turnout of 240 teams and more than 2,800 players to New York State's Capital Region, wasn't its traditional showcase for both established and emerging talent.

The list of future stars here this year was lengthy, and sure to add to the roll call of current NBA players (Emeka Okafor, Michael Beasley, Stephon Curry, Joakim Noah, among others) and hundreds of event alums who are currently playing or have played at the highest level of college basketball.

Who's next from this year's GymRat CHALLENGE?

The list is lengthy, but start with event Most Valuable GymRats Stephen Vasturia (17-under division), a prototypical 6-foot-4 off-guard who played up an age level and already has recruiting interest from ACC and Big East teams; and, Harrison Taggart (16-under), a 6-5 forward whose work here surely will begin attracting future Division I interest.

Then there's Tyrone Johnson (15-under), a lightning-quick left-handed guard in the Nate Archibold mold who was one of the better point guards here at any level.

Justin Campbell, an already well-built yet slinky 6-2 forward dominated the 14-under division with a game reminiscent of former Siena standout Edwin Ubiles. And Jared Rivers (13-under), who capably directed his team's play at both ends is a developing standout in the legendary Long Island Lutheran High School program. He has his sights set on playing at North Carolina. And based on his play here that aspiration might just come true.

Who else is next? How about players who will have big impacts in the future, in a literal sense. There seemed to be more quality big players here than in recent memory, particularly in the 15-under bracket.

Start with slender 7-foot-1 Paschal Chukwu of the Frenji program from White Plains, N.Y., who showed rare footwork and athleticism for a player so tall yet so young.

Back in 2004 GymRat talent evaluators identified a young, otherwise unknown, undersized and slightly pudgy guard named Jimmer Fredette as one of the best young players at this event. It was the proverbial “Coming Out Party,” for Fredette, this past season’s College Player of the Year as a senior at BYU.

Similarly the 2011 event might one day be remembered as the first event Chukwu took center stage as a young player, particularly one who has only been playing the sport for less than a year.

Another 15-under level “big,” 6-foot-10 Karl Towns of Sports U Team IZOD of Montclair, N.J., just finished eighth grade and already has a wide reputation in basketball circles as the #1 rated 8<sup>th</sup> grader in the country.

There were countless others here for the 2011 GymRat CHALLENGE who will continue to progress and, eventually, reach basketball’s heights to join an already lengthy list of alumni from an event that, in its 14-year history, has built a reputation as being a springboard to stardom.

## **17:U Age Division**

### **Another Title For Team-Oriented Jersey Shore Warriors**

ALBANY, N.Y. – A year ago coach Tony Sagona’s Jersey Shore Warriors program won this division’s championship with a talented group of budding Division I players who subjugated their individual skills for the betterment of the team.

New year, same story for the Warriors who brought an entirely new cast of players but the same old team-first style of play that earned the same result as in 2010 ... another GymRat CHALLENGE championship.

The Warriors used a controlled, half-court style that stressed good passing that led to open shots and, eventually, a 46-40 victory over a talented Sports U Team IZOD program.

The Warriors built an early lead, sank open shots and, then, made free throws and big plays down the stretch to hold off Sports U in the championship contest Sunday night at the University at Albany’s SEFCU Arena.

Age-division MVG (Most Valuable GymRat) Stephen Vasturia displayed all the skills that already has him attracting interest from high-major Division I programs, even though he’s just finishing off his sophomore year in high school.

Vasturia, a 6-foot-4 guard with uncanny court intelligence and rare long-range shooting skills, made six 3-pointers in a quarterfinal-round contest that helped ensure his team continued to advance and, then, was part of a well-balanced offensive attack in the championship game with nine points. Teammate 6-3

point guard Ron Curry Jr., an athletic backcourt performer who recently gave a verbal commitment to James Madison University, also scored nine points and ran the winners' offensive attack to near perfection.

"This is awesome to come up here and win," said Vasturia. "The key for us is that everyone buys into the team concept."

It doesn't hurt that the program has had considerable success on the AAU circuit, including three GymRat 17-under division titles over the years (1999, 2010 and this year's).

"A lot of our former players come back and practice with our current team members and that helps," said coach Sagona. "They're example for our young guys. "Mostly, though, we get good kids that buy into our system. We've got talent, too, but the kids just know how to win."

"Tony's truly one of the GOOD GUYS on the AAU circuit" commented GymRat CHALLENGE chief, John Kmack "He always has great kids and great teams. Tony's been in this racket for a long time. He never seems to get rattled and that composure clearly rubs off on his players."

And, if anyone needs proof of that ... well, emerging from a 96-team bracket this year for a second-straight GymRat championship should suffice.

### **17:U All-GymRat CHALLENGE MVG – Most Valuable GymRat**

**Stephen Vasturia (6-4 SG) Jersey Shore Warriors/St. Joseph's Prep School:** A highly skilled player with, arguably, the best shooting touch at this year's event. He will kill opponents from the 3-point line when left open. Extremely high basketball I.Q. who always seems to make the right play and moves very well without the ball. Does a great job using screens and he's also an above-average ball-handler and a great passer with court vision. Made a late-game defensive steal, by being in the right place, that helped secure the victory in the championship game. Has already drawn interest from Boston College and Georgetown.

### **17:U All-GymRat CHALLENGE TEAM**

**Ron Curry Jr. (6-3 PG) Jersey Shore Warriors/Paul IV School:** An excellent on-ball defender who also plays the passing lanes very well. Has good court vision and always on the attack looking for teammates in the open court. A capable shooter with good size and athleticism for his position, allowing him to finish in the lane. Solid point guard skills. Has made a verbal commitment to James Madison University.

**Maurice Taylor (6-5 SF) Team Prodigy/Cambridge Rindge & Latin:** Versatile player with a nice shooting touch inside the 3-point line. Shows the ability to bring the ball up and start the offense. He's long and athletic and does a good job using his size at both ends to control the

boards. He's going to be a good inside/outside scorer on the next level. Offered by Siena and Boston University with interest from Boston College.

**Jacquil Taylor (6-9 C/F) Team Prodigy/Cambridge Rindge & Latin:** Long, athletic and very mobile for his size. He runs the floor hard every trip, and has excellent hands that allow him to catch and finish on the fast break. Like most lefties he favors his right shoulder in the low post. Looks to have great upside and should improve. Offered by Siena and Boston University with interest from Boston College.

**Tyler Roberson (6-6 F) N.J. Roadrunners/Union School:** Athletic with long arms and active on the boards at both ends. Runs the floor very well and has good hands that allow him to catch and finish with ease on the break. An excellent talent with great upside. But, like most young and very talented players, he played here to the level of his competition. Interest from Georgetown and Kentucky already.

**Aaron Bodie, (6-6 F) N.J. Roadrunners/East Side H.S.:** An extremely high-energy player who is very active on the offensive boards. A player whose athleticism adds to his overall game. Showed a nice shooting touch here out to the foul line. Has drawn early interest from Temple, among others.

**Brandon Hashim (6-1 SG) Keystone Blazers-Black/Upper Darby H.S.:** Complete shooting guard with ability to shoot 3-pointers, take you off the dribble or create for his teammates. Long arms for his size and explosive first step enables him to play the passing lanes very well. This was his first AAU event, but should attract mid-major Division I interest.

**Ryan Spadaford (6-4 SG) Rising Stars/Southside H.S.:** Hard-nosed kid who always plays all out and doesn't back down from anyone. Can drive the ball well to the right, and can also sink 3-pointers when left-open. A good on-ball defender. He can create his own shot offensively. Drawing interest from Ivy League programs.

**Jalan Branford (6-1 PG) York Ballers/Reading H.S.:** Young point guard with excellent court vision. He can get into the lane at will and, with his size, he can finish in traffic or kick out to open teammates. An excellent ball-handler, but needs to improve his outside shot to be the complete point guard he can be. Also a standout football player and getting heavy interest from schools to play that sport.

**Marquis Marshall (6-4 SG) York Ballers/Reading H.S.:** Smooth game with sweet shooting touch from the 3-point line. A versatile player capable of scoring in many different ways. A good athlete who attacks the basket when played close. His development will rely on ability to gain weight and strength. Has interest from mid-majors Siena, Rider and Mount St. Mary's.

**Quenton Decosey (6-5 SF) Sports U Team Izod/St. Joseph's Metuchen:** Smooth performer who makes the game look effortless. He scores from a variety of angles and reverse layups around the hoop. Also has the athleticism to play above the rim. He takes over games in crunch time, but has a tendency to coast against inferior talent. Solid jump-shooter with above-average passing skills. High-major interest from Notre Dame, Seton Hall and St. John's.

**Dustin Hogue (6-6 PF) Sports U Team IZOD/Career H.S. for Sports Mott Haven:** One of the top true athletes here. He attacks the rim with reckless abandon. Wants to dunk on you. Plays much taller than his height with his leaping ability and quick second jump. Can face up out to 15 feet and can put the ball on the ground to score. Rebounds well in and out of area. Interest from MAAC schools, also UTEP and Marshall.

**Dallas Anglin (6-0 PG) Sports U Team IZOD/Seton Hall Prep:** Possibly the most explosive point in the tournament. Even at his height is capable of dunking in traffic. He is a well-rounded player looking to drive first, shoot second, but shoots the ball well. He can get to the bucket at will with either hand and either finishes or finds open teammates. Interest from Florida, St. Joe's, Rice, SMU, Siena.

**Rashad Andrews (6-5 SF) Sports U Team IZOD/St. Anthony's H.S.:** Very smooth game. Doesn't force anything yet takes advantage of every opening. Knocks down open shots beyond the 3-point line, and shows a solid handle and quick first step to the hoop. Due to team's talent he disappears at times. But, makes plays in big moments. Above-average athlete and good defender. Florida, St. Joe's, Rice, SMU and Siena have interest.

**Kasim Chandler (5-11 PG) Sports U Team IZOD/Newark East Side:** Tremendous end-to-end speed and can get into the lane at will. Has a yo-yo handle and is rarely out of control. Ultimate pass-first point guard who always finds open teammates at the right time. More than a capable scorer who is at his best attacking the basket. Interest from Siena, Xavier, Providence, SMU, Seton Hall.

**Loucius Jones (6-5 SF/SG) Sports U Team IZOD/St. Anthony's H.S.:** Jack of all trades who is above-average in every facet of the game. He is athletic and can be a lock-down defender when he wants. Excels in the open floor and attacking the basket. He knocks down open jumpers and is capable enough to help on the boards. Interest from Siena, Robert Morris.

**Dijon Allen-Jordan (6-6 SF/PF) Sports U Team IZOD/Plainfield H.S.:** Long, lanky player that plays taller. He is a threat out to the 3-point line and can take you off the dribble. Versatility is his strength. Effective around the basket, yet can also play small forward. Shows nice timing on shot-blocking and rebounds well in his area. High motor and always plays hard. Wagner, Mount St. Mary's showing early interest.

**Darren Payen (6-7 PF) East Coast Elite/Hamden Hall Country Day School:** Athletic lefty post player at his best getting out and running the floor and finishing around the basket. Has a nasty streak and will look to dunk in traffic with either hand. Jumper is OK out to 12 feet, but no further. Could use work on his mechanics. Plays above the rim and rebounds well in and out of his area. Yale, St. Francis, Bucknell all interested.

**Robert Hazard (6-2 PG) R.I. Breakers/North Kingstown H.S.:** One of most-explosive point guards here. Is capable of getting to the hoop at will with either hand and can finish above the rim. Uick release on his jumper makes him tough to guard. Has a strong body and can finish through contact. Best in the open floor and attacking. Capable passer when needed. Richmond, St. Louis, Siena, Georgetown all interested.

**Demetrius Thomas (6-6 SF) Westchester Warriors/Bossick H.S.:** A long, athletic swing man with explosive leaping ability and great lateral quickness. Plays mostly on the perimeter offensively, slashing to the hoop for a variety of mid-range shots. Extremely versatile on defense and can guard positions 1-through-4. A great rebounder/shot-blocker. He had an 18-rebound effort in one game here.

**Zach Koralis (6-3 SF/SG) New England Storm-Black/North Andover H.S.:** A sharp-shooting slasher who deceptively scores in bunches. Had multiple 20-point games in pool player here. Tremendous mid-range game and finishes well for his size. Size and athleticism probably keeps him out of the scholarship level, but still very skilled and would be a Division 3 steal. Union College is involved.

**Jameel Warney (6-8 C/PF) Jersey Hot Shots/Rosell Catholic:** An explosive interior force with great feet and ability to score around the hoop, rebound and finish plays offensively . Provided several highlight-reel dunks here and blocked shots. His perimeter skills are lacking, but if he develops an outside shot his stock would rise drastically. Interest from more than a dozen mid-major programs.

**Nikko Velez (5-8 PG) Jersey Hot Shots/Roselle Catholic:** A quick point guard with a high IQ who showed great ability to penetrate and pass. Strong guarding the ball, and has ability to pressure opposing guards in the backcourt. Has average outside-shooting ability and needs to develop more consistency to have an impact at the next level, but still has scholarship-level ability because of explosive point-guard play.

**Aaron Davis (5-11 PG) Middlesex Magic/Brooks School:** An explosive point guard who is great in transition. His mentality is pass first and turns down shots to move the ball and get everyone involved. Sometimes too unselfish. Tremendous ball defende. His ability to shoot consistently from the perimeter will determine his eventual level. Interest from NESCAC, NE-10, some Ivy and Patriot teams.

**Matthew Wisley (6-6 SF) LVBS Elite/Emmaus H.S.:** A long, skinny small forward who is deceptively athletic getting up a few times for highlight-level dunks. Has great ball-handling and passing abilities for his size.. Can make an outside shot, but needs more consistency in shooting. Lacks a post-up game, but because of height has scholarship-level potential. So far, mostly D-III schools heavily involved.

**Chris Ortiz (6-7 PF/SF) Westchester Hawks Select/South Kent Academy:** A long, explosive “next-level” athlete with great timing and hands. Tremendous rebounder in traffic, and a shot-blocker. Phenomenal lateral quickness and perimeter defender. Showed an ability to knock down perimeter shots and pass the ball. Tends to fade away on shots and not attack the rim aggressively. Some A-10 interest, also America East and MAC.

**Randy Stephens (6-3 SG) Westchester Hawks Select/Mt. Vernon H.S.:** A long, smoothin lefty guard who scores at will. His game looks effortless and he is rarely out of control. Although his jumper looks unorthodox he showed deep range knocking down 25-footers here. Despite his casual appearance he is a lock-down defender using his quick feet and length to his advantage. Solid mid-major recruit and a steal for a low-major.

**Kachi Nzerum (6-5 SF) Boston Warriors-Blue/Marianapolis H.S.:** Physical wing scorer who shoed ability to finish through contact. Did great work in the mid post, showing a quick bounce to finish. Range to 3-line when set and enough handle to get to the rim. Averaged 16 points per game here. Niagara, Maine, some NEC schools involved.

**Torrance Dyck (6-4 SF) East Coast Fusion/East H.S.:** Live-bodied lefty wing player who went for 17 in one game here. Has excellent ability to finish in transition and creates his own mid-range jumper. He will continue to improve his catch-and-shoot range and add strength to his frame to prepare for the next level. Low D-I’s, many D-II’s already showing interest.

**Matt Henry (6-2 PT) East Coast Fusion/Canisius H.S.:** True floor general who commands his team. Excellent change of pace to handle pressure and to create in the half court. Showed set range from 3-point line and a solid floater in the lane. Added strength will allow him to succeed at the next level. Ivies, Patriots and numerous D-II’s already interested.

**Joey Glynn (6-6 SF) Middlesex Magic/Cardinal Spellman:** Physical face-up forward who led his team in scoring, including a 21-point effort in one game. Sneaky finisher around the rim who seeks contact at the finish. Stepped out for mid-range jumpers, too, and will continue to extend that range. Plays extremely hard. Low D-I’s, Ivy League teams mostly involved.

**Anthony Barry (6-3 Wing) Middlesex Magic/Brooks School:** Mature, physical wing who battled to put up a 20-point game here. Excellent shooter from mid range and seeks contact to get to

the line. Very effective with a bounce or two, but will need to tighten handle as me moves up. Some Ivies, NE 10's already involved.

**Kendrick Ray (6-1 G) BC Eagles-LaFrance/Middletown H.S.:** Blazing quick, creative guard who excelled with the ball in his hands. Made big shots in mid-range, averaging 15 points here. Streaky stroke from 3-point range and very creative from 15 feet and in for both himself and teammates. Iona, Fairfield, Hofstra and Central Connecticut are interested.

**Jonte Rutty (6-5 PF) BC Eagles/Newburgh Free Academy:** Thick, tough power forward with a crafty left-handed game. Effective post passer and finisher and will be a handful on the block as he continues to mature. Did step out to show some range, but most success came from mid-post and in. Drexel, George Washington, some America East and NEC teams are interested.

**Zach Rufer (6-3 Wing) BC Eagles/Burke Catholic H.S.:** Crafty wing scorer who did damage in the mid range throughout this event. Sneaky finisher through contact who showed some streaks from 3-point range and scored in bunches. Seemed to make the big play when needed, and will continue to progress as skills get sharper. Interest from Davidson, Ivies.

**Malik Gill (5-9 PG) Brooklyn Ballers/Mt. St. Michael:** Great floor general with a really quick first step. At his best when he can get in the lane and create for teammates. Outstanding court vision and always looking to pass first. Has a floater and a nice mid-range pull-up shot. Stony Brook and Wagner have offered. Some contact from Fordham, LIU, Manhattan.

**Rakim Leshane (6-4 Wing) Brooklyn Ballers/Lincoln H.S.:** Very athletic wing who is at his best in the open floor. Great finisher around the rim, very bouncy. Played hard at both ends. Active hands and feet on the defensive end. Good pull-up jumper. Double-digit scorer in every game here. Looks like low D-I player.

**Jordan Barham (6-4 Wing) Ohio Shooting Stars/University School:** Lefty wing who is a drive-first guard. Great at creating space as he drives to the basket. Big, strong body allows him to stay balanced through contact. Scores at will in the paint and on drives, over 20 points in several games here. Will be extremely effective in the right system. Academic D-I's involved.

**Louis Costen (6-4 Wing) CWB Knights/Wadleigh H.S.:** Long, athletic wing with deep shooting range. Has a great pull-up as well as a consistent 3-point shot. Good finisher in transition. Plays above the rim. Under-the-radar guy who could be a steal. Central Connecticut, some NEC schools involved early.

**Steven Gomes (6-6 Wing) CWB Knights/Wings Academy:** Under-the-radar athlete with long arms and an athleticism that matches high-level wings. Loves to play in the open floor and

accelerate to the basket. Gets his shot off any time he wants. Put up 13 points, 11 rebounds in an early game here. Early interest from low D-I level.

**E.J. Blackman (6-2 Wing) LI Lightning-Cox/Half Hollow Hills H.S.:** One of the most-explosive athletes here. Was a human highlight film during pool play. Good handle and can create off the bounce. More of a slasher than anything, but can elevate from any angle. Good on both ends, strong defender. Looks like mid-major level potential.

**Kevin Miller (6-9 C) Hdynasty/Morris Knolls H.S.:** Long athletic shot-blocker. Changes the game on the defensive end. Good feet and good hands for a big. Needs to put on weight and get stronger. Could develop into a terrific player in time. Offensive skills are good with his back to the rim. Getting D-II interest early.

**Josh Armstrong (6-4 Wing) Brooklyn Badgers-Gray/Bushick Campus:** Long, big-time athlete. Has a great stroke from 3-point and mid range. Long arms and really active on defense. Great elevation on jumper allows him to get his shot off with ease. Might prep to get more looks. Under-the-radar player who looks ready to blow up in terms of college interest.

**Kyle Richardson (6-5 Wing) Team Buckets/Baldwin H.S.:** Carried his team to the semifinals here. Long and athletic wing who showed great basketball IQ. Has a good mid-range jumper and slashing ability. Needs to improve range and consistently from long range. Had 22 points, including game-winner to get team to semifinals. Projects as good D-II player, at least.

### **17:U Honorable Mention All-GymRat CHALLENGE**

Kevin LaFrancis (6-6 F) New England Storm-Black  
Matt Ellis (6-6 G) New England Storm-Black  
Adam Bramanti (6-1 G) New England Storm-Black  
Jarred Ford (6-5 F) South Jersey Jazz  
David Haye (5-11 G) Rockland Rockets  
Wesley Cherry (6-4 SF) Jersey Hot Shots  
Kenny Reed (5-11 G) Boston Warriors Blue  
Tyson Hallowell (6-2 G) Boston Warriors Blue  
Deyshanee Much (6-2 G) East Coast Fusion  
Jon Blythers (6-1 G) East Coast Fusion  
Jonah Brooks (6-2 G) East Coast Fusion  
Justin Bell (6-2 G) Long Island Lightning  
Marty Lewis (5-9 G) Ct. Hoop Dreams  
Kyle Reardon (6-5 F) Middlesex Magic  
Nick Melosky (6-3 G) The Feeder Program

DJ Brown 96-5 F) The Feeder Program  
Jarrod Scurlock (5-11 G) B.C. Eagles-LaFrance  
Xavier Nieves (6-2 G) Wayne PAL Wolfpack  
Matt Droney (6-4 F) Boston Warriors-Blue  
Zachery Muhr (5-9 G) LVBS Elite  
Kreshawn Jude (6-4 F) Westchester Hawks  
Quadear Lovell (5-8 G) Westchester Hawks  
Omari Manhertz (-4 F) Westchester Hswks  
Angel Ortez (5-9 G) Teamwork  
Khari Rollock (6-2 G) Long Island Lightning-Curry  
Matt Mobley (6-2 G) Worcester West Wolfpack  
Tim Sheridan (6-5 F) Worcester West Wolfpack  
Danny Liming (6-5 F) House of Hoops  
Rahfik Slaughter (5-11 G) Mt. Pleasant Bulldogs  
Shaquille Mosley (5-7 G) Team Buckets  
Duke Francis (6-3 G) Academy BBall Club  
Michael Argosh (6-3 G) Academy BBall Club  
Akil Lewis (6-5 F) Maryland Hoop Masters TC  
Brandon Miller (6-1 G) The Pride  
Devon Robertson (6-3 G) Mass Premier Elite  
Sean Myers (6-2 G) Mass Premier Elite  
Houston Dugan (6-5 F) Brooklyn Ballers  
Darius Rhodes (6-4 G) Brooklyn Ballers  
Jawuan Brumfield (5-9 G) Roc City Ballers  
Jon Gimble (6-7 F) Rock Solid  
Eugene Lewis (6-3 G) Rock Solid  
Travis Buckner (6-1 G) Rock Solid  
Rijkard Herard (6-1 G) Team N.J. Select Stars  
Michael Campo (5-8 G) Team N.J. Select Stars  
James Vice (6-1 G) City Rocks White  
Kareem Brown (6-5 F) City Rocks White  
Jackson Shea (6-3 G) City Rocks White  
Neil Vierra (6-3 G) Brooklyn Badgers Red  
Brenden Fowler (6-6 F) Mass Elite  
Myles Penniman (6-7 C) Mass Elite  
Pat Burns (6-6 F) Mass Elite  
Pat Talentino (6-1 PG) Mass Elite  
Freddy Shove (6-3 Wing) Mass Elite

Troy Parker (6-0 G) Maryland Hoopmasters Hardy  
Esaun Mobley (6-3 G) Hdynasty  
Nikalaos Kotoulas (6-6 F) Hdynasty  
Joseph Mulvaney (6-2 G) Keystone Blazers-Red  
Tony Beauliau (6-3 G) New England Demans  
DeShawn Benson (6-5 F) LI Lightning-Cox  
James Costello (6-3 G) New England Storm-Silver  
Ryan Freeman (6-6 F) New England Storm-Silver  
Dave Walker (6-7 F) Ohio Shooting Stars  
Pierce Cumpstone (6-5 F) Ohio Shooting Stars  
Mohamed Dansoko (6-5 F) Brooklyn Badgers-Gray  
Darnell Glover (6-6 F) Sports U Team IZOD  
Stephan Mosely (6-7 F) Sports U Team IZOD  
Jahmel Lane (6-4 G) Sports U Team IZOD  
Stephen Wilson (6-4 F) Sports U Team IZOD  
Reggie Eskbo (6-7 F) Buffalo Dragons  
Jamal Carter (6-0 G) Buffalo Dragons  
Jordan Williams (6-2 G) Buffalo Dragons  
Mark Wilson (6-3 G) NJ Crusaders  
Abel Yekeh (6-6 F) NJ Crusaders  
Kalisha NDoumbe Ngello (6-9 C) RI Breakers  
Mike Neal (6-6 F) RI Breakers  
Michael McCahey (6-5 F) NY Falcons  
Tyler Sayre (6-5 F) NY Falcons  
Logan Strumpf (6-5 F) Advanced Hoops  
Skyler Roman (6-0 G) Advanced Hoops  
Colten Lewis (6-7 F) Advanced Hoops  
Anthony Bowers (5-11 G) Chester Panthers  
Parris Ridgeway-Higgs (5-11 G) Chester Panthers  
Marquies Young (6-6 F) Syracuse Select  
Alonzo Grainger (6-0 G) Syracuse Select  
Billy Murphy (6-9 C) East Coast Elite  
AJ Tilghman (5-11 G) East Coast Elite  
Darryl Best Jr. (6-6 F) East Coast Elite  
Kenneth Hemstead (6-5 F) East Coast Elite  
Evan Maywell (6-7 F) New Heights NYC  
Theo Brown (6-5 F) New Heights NYC  
Sguna Ajsyi (6-5 F) New Heights NYC

Tremaine Bowman (6-0 G) York Ballers  
James Brown (6-5 F) York Ballers  
Cornell Yarde (6-3 G) York Ballers  
Malique McLaren (5-7 G) Prodigy  
Christian Dunston (5-9 G) Prodigy  
Tevonn Walker (6-1 G) Hoopster Academy  
Jared Seltzer (6-7 F) Keystone Blazers-Black  
Jaleel Reed (6-2 G) Keystone Blazers-Black  
Scott Dennin (6-7 F) Keystone Blazers-Black  
Jordan Reed (6-4 G) Jersey Shore Warriors  
Bill Dooley (6-4 F) Jersey Shore Warriors  
Matt Banas (6-9 C) Jersey Shore Warriors  
Joe Lococo (6-2 G) Jersey Shore Warriors  
Kyle Pearson (6-7 F) Atlantic Arsenal  
Kevin Zychowski (6-1 G) Atlantic Arsenal  
Jumanne McDaniel (6-5 F) Atlantic Arsenal  
Mike Reid (6-1 G) Rising Stars  
Travis Whitfield (6-4 F) Rising Stars  
Nihad Mosovic (6-3 G) Rising Stars  
Henry Pendergast (6-3 G) Academic Basketball Club-Rubin  
Devin Mehra (6-4 F) Academic Basketball Club-Rubin  
Matt Daley (6-9 C) Academic Basketball Club-Rubin  
Haikim Saintil (6-0 G) NJ Roadrunners  
Morgan Dixon (6-2 G) NJ Roadrunners

## **16:U Age Division**

### **Understated, Overlooked Taggart Leads R.I. Hawks to Championship**

ALBANY, N.Y. – Harrison Taggart is only finishing his sophomore year in high school, but that’s the time colleges start showing interest in basketball prospects.

Taggart claims the interest he’s gotten thus far has been minimal. That’s likely to change, considering his performance at this year’s GymRat CHALLENGE AAU basketball tournament.

Taggart had 16 points, and made key plays down the stretch in the championship contest to lift his Rhode Island Hawks-Black team to a hard-fought 53-50 victory over Sports U Team IZOD for capture the crown of the under-16 division at the University at Albany’s SEFCU Arena Sunday night.

It’s the type of proverbial “coming out party” likely to draw more attention from college recruiters to the 6-foot-5 forward who attends St. Paul Prep School in Concord, N.H.

“I haven’t heard much from colleges yet,” he said. “If any are interested, I’d be glad to hear about it.”

That’s about as much self-promoting that will come from the division’s MVG – Most Valuable GymRat – whose demeanor is considerably more understated than his game.

Afterwards, when talking about the achievements ... his award and his team’s success ... Taggart rolled out all the clichés.

“No single person did this ... we have a team of skilled players who worked together and pushed through whatever obstacles we faced,” he said. “Our opponent (Sports U Team IZOD) is a great team and we really looked up to them.”

Clearly, everything about Taggart and his play is no brag, just fact.

The facts spoke loudly enough. Not only did he make big plays in the championship game, but he also made one particular big-time effort that helped turn a semifinal-round contest in his team’s favor, too.

Typically, he didn’t even score a basket on the play in question, instead diving out of bounds to save the ball that he flipped to a teammate. Once he got back in bounds he took a pass on the wing, dribbled into traffic and shoveled a no-look pass to a teammate for a key layup that pushed Rhode Island’s late-game lead from three to five to help secure a 55-45 semifinal-round victory over the New Jersey Cyclones.

It’s that type of court acumen that likely will attract plenty of future looks from college talent scouts.

Taggart, though, fits right in to the Rhode Island team’s philosophy of team play.

Tem first? Head coach Jason Elliott so much wanted to defer credit for the title to his players that he opted not to be part of the post-championship team photo.

“We’ve got a lot of kids from all over on our team, so it’s been hard to get them all together for any practices yet,” said Elliott. “We were fortunate that we built some confidence early in the tournament by getting out to big leads in several of our games.”

“What we do is a credit to coach Elliott,” added Taggart, dishing off credit as easily as he dished that key semifinal-round game assist. “He doesn’t allow us to stand around and go one-on-one at any point. He preaches team offense and team defense, and that’s how we play.”

It’s a style that overcame any individual match-up deficiencies his team faced against a more-physically imposing opponent.

“To be honest, I didn’t think we could win this game,” admitted Taggart.

Maybe even the Hawks’ own coach fell victim to the same shortcoming of college recruiters to date, that of underestimating the affect the understated but effective performance of his standout player, Harrison Taggart, can have on an outcome.

After Taggart’s performance in the GymRat CHALLENGE, his abilities aren’t likely to be overlooked any more.

### **16:U All-GymRat CHALLENGE MVG – Most Valuable GymRat**

**Harrison Taggart (6-5 F) Rhode Island Hawks/St. Paul’s Prep:** A do-everything forward in the mold of Vermont standout Brian Voekel. Dougle-digit rebounds in some prelim-round games here and led the fast break after some of them. Showed lightning-quick spin move in the paint as well as superb interior and transition passing. Diving, hustle play in the semifinal round helped seal the game. Picked up scoring when it mattered most. Deferred to teammates at times, but always came up big late in games.

### **16:U Honorable Mention All-GymRat CHALLENGE**

**Antwoine Anderson (6-0 G) Franchise Ballers-Kemp/Bishop Kearney:** Lefty, high-level athlete with good instincts on defense. Unselfish with good court vision and passing ability. Could become true PG with tighter handle and more confidence in right hand. Still, gets in lane and scores in bunches. Impressive alley-oop is part of his game, along with multiple dunks and big-time assists.

**Justin Robinson (5-7 PG) Kingston Komets/Kingston H.S.:** Tough, gritty and vocal floor general. Super-tight handle with both hands. Court vision and sees plays develop before they do, and always delivers the pass. Lightning-quick hands created at least 15 turnovers throughout the pool play round here.

**Kurt Steidl (6-4 Wing) CBC/Ridgefield (Ct.) H.S.:** Skilled wing who has ability to rebound and run break. Good handle and a great passer. Showed range beyond college 3, which sets up his ability to shoot, fake or drive off the bounce. Deceptive athleticism and ability to finish with both hands makes him dangerous if he gets defenders on his hip. Gets after it on the glass on both ends.

**Jeff Racy (6-3 SG) CBC/Ridgefield (Ct.) H.S.:** Sniper from beyond the 3-point line. Doesn't need much airspace to get off his shot. Utilizes his ability to shoot to also penetrate defense and set up his strong pull-up game. High IQ player who knows how to get open without the ball. Projects as a potential Patriot League player for now.

**Amar Stules (6-1 PG) Jersey Shore Warriors/La Salle H.S.:** Great court vision, a true playmaker who excels in transition and is a big-time finisher. Smooth lead guard who excels at getting to the paint with a quick first step. Very strong with the ball and attacks lane with reckless abandon. Seeks contact a la Dwayne Wade, and lives at the foul line. Capable mid-range shot, and can hit the 3 with feet set. Projects as at least an A-10 player.

**Merdic Green (6-3 Wing) Jersey Shore Warriors/Harry S. Truman School:** High energy player who has a nose for the ball. Active defender who has ability to lock up opponent's top perimeter threat. Athletic finisher who can finish through contact. Excels in transition with space in the open floor. Capable of hitting the college 3, but more comfortable in mid-range. Projects as low-major level player.

**Sammy Mojica Jr. (6-3 Wing) MABC/Chelsea (Ma. ) H.S.:** Scores in variety of ways and doesn't need to have the ball to be effective. Gets numerous second-chance points and points off steals. Efficient player. Long, athletic and really plays passing lanes well. Not flashy, but finds open man and uses body well when penetrating. Comfortable in mid range and showed he could hit college 3. Versatile defender, can match up with 1 through 4. Potential mid-major level.

**Isiah Davis (6-2 SG) Hard 2 Guard/St. Patrick's:** Slashing combo guard who excels at beating his man off the bounce. Has ability to hang and finish with contact in paint. Showed ability to hit college 3, but struggled to find consistency from there over the weekend. Tremendous length and quickness gives him ability to lock down perimeter players. Played big late in stirring comeback elimination loss.

**Elijah Rogers (5-10 PG) NE Ballas/Brookline H.S.:** Smooth lead guard who makes his living in the paint. Excelled all weekend in transition; has an extra gear. One of the best distributors in his age group. Hit some 3's, but more effective in mid range off the bounce. Capable beyond the stripe when feet are set. Finishes well with contact and with either hand against bigs. Projects as A-10/CAA level.

**Jake Fay (6-5 SG) NE Ballas//Brimmer & May School:** Big-time shooter with range beyond college 3. Very effective using his shooting strength to create scoring off the bounce into his pull-up game. Rebounded well here, especially on the offensive glass. Will need to continue to develop handle to thrive against A-10 competition. Early verbal to Fordham.

**Shyquinn Dixon (5-10 PG) USAD/Stamford H.S.:** Baby-faced lead guard who elevated his team's play while on the floor. Knows how to change speeds to beat defenders off the bounce, while having ability to blow by defenders using his quickness. Thinks like a wily veteran. Uncanny feel/vision in the paint to find open teammates when help comes to defend him. Limited range on jumper, but plays to his strength. Projects as definite D-I player.

**Chris Leak Jr. (6-2 2G) USAD/Hillhouse H.S.:** Athletic wing who lived in the paint during pool play. Flashed ability to hit pull-up jumper from 12-to-15-foot range. Creative finisher in lane. Uses glass well. Has good floater, pull-up game. Struggled from perimeter with jump shot here, but played to his strengths and played through an injured wrist. Rebounded well despite giving up size. Mid-major level player.

**Torrance Samuel (6-3 PG) New Heights-Blue/South Shore H.S.:** Good size for a point guard. Excellent handle, can go either direction. Good court vision. Can run an offense. Can knock down open jumper, including beyond 3-point range. Can also finish at the rim. Needs to get stronger and be more aggressive looking for his shot. High major player, drawing interest from Villanova, Rutgers and Cincy.

**Shamiek Shephard (6-4 2G) New Heights Blue/ South Shore H.S.:** Athletic wing player who plays above the rim and will dunk when opportunity arises. Easily finishes inside with power. Strong rebounder for his size. Can handle in the open floor. Good defender who stays in front of his man. Has to develop more-consistent jumper. Only shoots from 15 feet in. Very tough player. Fordham, Hofstra have shown interest.

**Jalen Jenkins (6-7 PF) New Heights Blue/Cardinal Hayes:** Long body and very active around the hoop. Long arms and quickness allow him to defend and block shots. Decent athleticism. More effective close to the hoop, but can put the ball on the floor and dribble with either hand. Doesn't shoot well yet from perimeter. Projects to mid-major level.

**Calvin Crawford (6-6 SF) East Coast Panthers/Valley Central H.S.:** Shows a lot of potential. Moves well, good anticipation when defending. Good athletic skill. But, he tends to float around on the perimeter. Needs to get stronger physically. If he does, he can reach potential. Projects to low D-I or D-II player.

**Isshiak Coleman (6-4 SF) New England Ballas/New Mission:** Jumps out of the gym. Will finish at the rim with dunks. Quick off his feet, allowing him to contest and block shots. Limited

offensively right now. Gets by with superior athleticism moreso than with his skills. Projects as a D-II player right now.

**Naasir Williams (5-10 PG) New Heights-Blue/Rice H.S.:** Quick and strong point guard. Easily gets past his defenders. Showed good ability as a spot-up shooter. Consistently knocks down the 3-pointer when his feet are set and he's open. Still sharpening point guard skills. Projects as a low-D-I level player.

**Brian Daniels (6-3 SF) East Coast Panthers/Briarcliff H.S.:** Solid frame, built like a football linebacker. Strong in the post. Unorthodox moves because he is left-handed. Has a nice fadeaway baby jumper from 12-to-15 feet. Sometimes slightly out of control, but is still learning. Very enthusiastic. Projects to D-II level.

**Tayvon Myers (6-1 SG) New Heights Blue/Boys & Girls H.S.:** Wiry frame who has a very good jump shot, both mid-range and from 3-point territory. Decent jumping ability. Average handle, but good enough to get where he wants to go.

**Charles Correa (5-8 PG) Rhode Island Hawks-Black/St. Raphael Academy:** Extremely quick point guard. Able to finish inside using either hand. Has deep range beyond the 3-point line. Exceptional handle. Uses an array of spins and crossovers to get away from defenders. Key member of tournament championship team.

**Denzel Gregg (6-6 PF) Syracuse Select/Bishop Grimes:** Size, length and instincts. Elite defender potential. Threw a block party in pool play. Quick, simple moves in the post and finishes through contact. Relocates well on dribble penetration by teammates. Turns 16 in October and will attend St. Thomas Moore school Sky is the limit for him.

**Aaron Crust (5-11 SG) LI Lightning/Uniondale:** Versatile guard who drops buckets in every way. Gets in the paint and finishes from tough angles. Shoots set and pull-up jumpers out to 3-point range. Dropped 25 points in the second-half of hard-fought 3-point loss to Kingston Komets in championship bracket play.

**Danny Pierrot (6-2 SG) LI Knights/St. Anthony's:** Super bouncy athlete who put on an aerial show in important pool round win here. At home in transition, seemingly always in front of the play Smooth jumper out to 3-point range to go with nice first step. More exposure and improved handle could make him a big-time prospect.

**Tyquan Roland (6-2 SF) Salt City/Nottingham H.S.:** Long lefty forward with a knack for finding loose balls and a motor for getting them. Strong out-of-area rebounding skills. Solid-looking frame with a good-looking, albeit a bit streak, jump shot out to 18 feet. Had at least three assists in every game here.

**Kip Stewart (5-9 G) R.I Hawks-Red/Mt. Pleasant:** Well-built combo guard who uses phenomenal change of speeds to get into the lane. Pitches up ahead in transition and dishes off in the half court. Good looking feet-set 3-point jumper. Physical defender. Good scorer in pool play while playing solid lead-guard position and running the team.

**Colin Richey (6-1 SG) Blackstone Valley Chaos/Whitinsville Christian School:** High IQ player with excellent shooting mechanics. Very polished perimeter game including pull-up and catch-and-shoot jumpers, and good, solid handle with both hands. Vocal leader who moves well without the ball and uses screen well for his age. Averaged 24 points per game in pool play.

**Darien Fernandez (5-8 PG) Cape Cod Crossover/Wareham H.S.:** Immensely talented, strong point guard who sees the whole court. Still overly flashy and prefers lengthy, difficult passes to shorter safer passes. Lightning quick hands who uses them to disrupt opposing ball-handers, but only does so on occasion. Gets to basket at will and strong enough to finish. Capable of taking over games, but seemed interested only in playing on the offensive end here.

**Joshua Brown (6-4 G) Sports U Team IZOD/St. Anthony's:** A big guard with skills enough to play the point. Very unselfish player, who has excellent court vision and instinctive dishing ability. Good shototer, who can also drive to the hoop and is big enough to convert once he gets there. Projects to D-I level.

**Anfernee Cusimir (5-11 G) Boston Ballers/St. Anthony's:** Natural scorer who goes hard to hoop and finishes. Showed nice reverse lay-up ability Very quick, gets past defenders and dishes. Good offensive rebounder for his size. Showed nice floater shot from in the lane.

**Spencer Weisz (6-4 SG) Sports U Team IZOD/Seton Hall Prep:** Good-sized, true off-guard who also has playmaking skills. Very good on break, catches and finishes. Big enough to post smaller guards effectively. Good enough handle to play some point guard, when need arises. Very intelligent player. Size and skills might get him to mid-to-high major D-I level.

**Jamahl Lopez (5-10 PG) New England Storm-Black/Central Catholic:** A scoring point guard. Passes well in transition, but has good range out to 3-point stripe. Uses superior quickness to go by defenders and get into lane. Always looking to push the ball upcourt. Might project to D-I level.

**Josh Williams (6-4 F) C.J. Rebels/Trenton Central:** Long, lean forward who was the top shot-blocker in his division. Had at least five blocks in a half of one game. Good rebounder with strong hands. Gets off feet well and quickly. Runs floor well and excels at catching and finishing on the break. True game-changer on defense. Will be even better when his body fills out.

## **16:U Honorable Mention All-GymRat CHALLENGE**

Timothy Lewis (6-4, SF) NYC Jaguars  
Kieran Hamilton (5-9, PG) NYC Jaguars  
Nick Simpson (6-3 F) Boston Warriors East  
Zach Tonello (6-4 F) Cape Cod Crossover  
Chris Bourne (6-4 F) N.J. Cyclones  
Matt Votino (6-1 G) New Jersey Cyclones  
Mike Green (5-10 PG) C.J. Rebels  
Isaiah Nelson (6-5 PF) New England Storm-Black  
Julius VanGuine (5-8 PG) Mt. Pleasant Bulldogs  
Michael Casser (5-8 PG) House of Hoops-White  
Rodney Williams (5-7 PG) Connecticut Elite  
Joshua Drumgole (6-1 PG) LI Knights  
Latrell Washington (6-0 G) LI Knights  
DJ Mapes (6-4 SF) Kingston Komets  
Qassim Boss (6-4 PF) Jersey Extreme  
Eddie Robinson (6-0 SG) LI Lightning Pursoo  
Bay Barely (5-8 PG) Franchise Ballers-Kemp  
Jwan Smith (6-2 SF) Franchise Ballers-Kemp  
Timothy Lewis (6-4 SF) NYC Jaquars  
Zach Bouton (5-3 PG) Cornwall Dragons  
Chris Polanco (6-5 PF) New Heights NYC-White  
Matthew Sherlock (6-2 SG) Mass Evolution  
Jaleel Chain (5-11 PG) NJ Roadrunners  
Charles Smith (5-9 PG) NJ Roadrunners  
Jaquan Harris (5-11 SG) Bay State Magic  
Austin Woods (6-6 C) CBC  
Claude Payne (6-5 C) Hard2Guard  
Sean Chiwindo (6-2 SF) Hard2Guard  
Zeeve Gray-Mandell (6-6 C) New England Ballas  
Demitri Lewis (5-9 PG) New England Ballas  
Xavier Munoz (6-2 SF) New England Ballas  
Jaylon Smith (5-7 SG) Franchise Ballas-Smith  
Alec Mortillars (5-8 G) Franchise Ballas-Smith  
Jay Patterson (5-10 G) Franchise Ballas-Smith  
Luke Petrasek (6-7 C) LI Lightning-Kennedy  
Shaquan Sheppard (6-4 SF) Central Penn Ballers

Jarel Patterson (5-7 PG) Central Penn Ballers  
Jaleel Bell (6-3 SF) MABC Bengals  
Khalid Nwandu (6-1 G) Central Penn Ballers  
Yohanny Dalembert (6-7 C) Jersey Shore Warriors  
Maurice Mills (6-4 SF) D-Squad  
Terry Larrial (6-4 SF) Dream Nation  
Jerrell Reid (6-5 PF) Albany City Rocks Orange  
Eddie Mitchell (6-4 SF) Albany City Rocks-Orange  
Ben Engvall (6-4 PF) RI Hawks-Black  
Henry Bolton (6-1 G) RI Hawks-Black  
Tom Rivard (6-4 SF) RI Hawks-Black  
Kody Jenkins (6-4 SF) Sports U

## 15:U Age Division

### Versatility, Team Play Enable New Heights to Topple Sports U

ALBANY, N.Y. – Tyrone Johnson’s nickname is “Bird,” and his game has the versatility of former NBA great whose name is synonymous with versatility, Larry Bird.

But Johnson isn’t called “Bird” based on his court exploits. Instead, he said, it’s because when he was younger an aunt said his lips stuck out like a bird’s beak, thus the nickname.

Otherwise, the similarities to the former Boston Celtics’ great fit except in a much scaled-down version.

While Larry Bird was a 6-foot-9 power forward, Johnson is a slender 5-8 point guard. But Johnson’s versatile skill set – he shoots well, he dribbles well, and he passes well – was also the hallmark of Bird’s impact on basketball.

Johnson needed all of his skills at the GymRat CHALLENGE this weekend to help lift his New Heights-NYC team to a 37-34 victory over Sports U Team IZOD in the championship game of the 15-under division at the University at Albany’s SEFCU Arena Sunday night.

New Height’s victory was also testimony to how a good little man can help overcome height.

Sports U’s roster was populated by enough height to rival an NBA roster, starting with eighth-grader Karl Towns, a 6-foot-10 inside/outside presence who was arguably the most promising young player here, and 6-9, 260-pound Quadri Moore.

But New Heights had just enough height, led by a pair of 6-7 forwards Alex Wolfe and Tyshawn Myles to contend with Sports U’s mammoth front line. And, Sports U had no one to match New Height’s clear backcourt advantage when Johnson had the ball in his hands.

Johnson had 13 points in the championship game and Wolfe added eight.

The outcome was also a case of if you don’t succeed at first, then try, try again.

New Heights had fallen to Sports U in two previous meetings in other AAU tournaments earlier this spring season. But, not here.

“We played better defense and we made better decisions as a team,” said New Heights’ coach Shawn Mark.

“It was very important for us to play together against Sports U, because they’re so good,” added Johnson. “But we’re good, too, when we play together. We worked together, we didn’t point fingers at each other when we made mistakes. We worked hard and we played the whole game.”

Sounds like an apt description, too, of Johnson’s game, who provided a little bit of everything.

When asked what he does best on the court, Johnson, a freshman who played on the varsity level this past season at New York City's South Shore High School, had to think for several seconds before even trying to provide an answer.

It's because he does so many things well ... shoot, pass, beat pressure with his dribbling skills, run his team's offense ...

What did Johnson do best here? He provided a little bit of everything, and that was more than enough to help New Heights capture its GymRat CHALLENGE division championship.

### **15:U All-GymRat CHALLENGE MVG – Most Valuable GymRat**

**Tyrone Johnson (5-8 PG) New Heights NYC/South Shore H.S.:** Quick, talented guard with outstanding ball-handling skills. Lefty who delivers the ball to open teammates in transition. Still slightly out of control because he tries to play at too fast a speed. Exhibited a nice outside shot here. Gets to the basket and finishes and can pull up and make the running floater. One of the best small guards here at any level. Extremely bright future.

### **15:U All-GymRat CHALLENGE Team**

**Sal Biasi (5-10 G) Firm Elite Walker/Hazleton Area H.S.:** Very tough individual who plays hard at all times. Can penetrate and shoot off the dribble. Primary ball-handler who sees the court very well. Finishes in the lane. Capable enough shooter.

**Tyree Tyson (6-5 C) Upstate Elite/Bishop Timon:** Already has good size. Rebounds well and outlets the ball quickly. Strong enough to finish in the paint. Provides a nice inside presence. Showed potential for getting even better.

**Kieran Hamilton (5-9 G) NYC Jaguars/Holy Cross H.S.:** One of the most complete guard in the age division. He does it all ... handles well, passes well and shoots well. Very nice form on his jump shot. Capable of getting the ball and, then, getting out in transition.

**Donnell Clayton (6-1 SG) Brooklyn Badgers/South Shore H.S.:** Extremely athletic player who takes advantage of that trait. Can really shoot, nice lefty form. Does a little bit of everything as a 2-guard. Very involved in ensuring team's success in this event.

**Elijan Burns (6-4 F) City Rocks-Black/La Salle of Troy:** Gets to the hoop off the dribble. Goes after the ball on the boards with great intensity. Shoots ball well inside with range out to 15 feet. Already good skills for a small forward.

**Nick Marini (6-1 PG) City Rocks-Black/Christian Brothers Academy:** Strong point guard who is very creative with the ball in his hands. Solid enough to get to the hoop and finish. Can also shoot off the dribble. A consistent performer who looks like he'll get better.

**Nigel Carter (6-1 G) LI Lightning-Butler/St. Anthony's:** Makes a statement at the defensive end. Very active player who deflects passes and comes up with steals. Very athletic and can finish around hoop. Showed reverse lay-up ability in traffic. Good in transition and draws fouls. Solid leadership skills.

**Kavione Greene (6-3 2G) LI Lightning-Law/Amityville:** Very good shooter with a nice-looking stroke. Above-average size for a guard in this division, but already has all the skills to play the position. Key contributor to his team's success here.

**Tyler Lydon (6-6 C) RAP Memorial Squad/Pine Plains:** Skilled big man who does many things well, and a hard worker. He runs the floor, passes well from the high post and shows finesse around the hoop. Can block shots. Will also take a charge. Just needs strength to ensure improvement.

**Michael Coffey (6-0 G/F) RAP Memorial Squad/Monroe H.S.:** Scorer who can carry his team with his offense. Really knows how to put the ball in the basket. Gets to hoop. Crafty player with good spin dribble. Displayed pull-back dribble into a jump shot.

**Wade Baldwin (6-0 G) Sports U Team IZOD/Immaculata:** One of the best guards in the 15-under division. Plays under control. Showed good leadership skills. Can go coast to coast to score. Very quick hands. Plays good defense. Finishes strong on the offensive end. Excellent trap defender. Could be a high-major prospect.

**Quadri Moore (6-9 C) Sports U Team IZOD/Linden H.S.:** Great size, although a little too bulky. Runs court fairly well, although didn't do that consistently here. Decent shot inside 15 feet. Very strong player and appears very coachable. Considered one of the best young big-man prospects in New Jersey.

**Karl Towns (6-10 PF) Sports U Team IZOD/Pennington Prep:** Considered by one scouting service to be the best 8<sup>th</sup> grade prospect in the nation, and did nothing to disprove that here. Very comfortable on the perimeter facing the basket, and hits 3's with ease. Exceptional size and runs the floor well. A force on both ends of the court.

**Paschal Cuukwu (7-1 C) Team Frenji/Trinity School:** An African import who has been playing for less than a year. Tall, but still extremely center. Tremendous potential. Developing at a quick pace. Dominates in the paint. Great shot blocker. Will only get better with bulk/strength.

Converts lob passes into dunks. Decent footwork at this stage. Tremendous impact on games at both ends. The sky is the limit for him.

**Joel Villa (5-10 PG) Team Scan/Sacred Heart H.S.:** Good defender who often comes up with steals. Plays under control. Solid ball handler who makes good passes to open teammates. Rebounds very well for his size. Hustles all the time and clearly plays to win every game.

**Noah Brown (6-2 SG) N.J. Panthers/ Pope John H.S.:** Athletic guard who already has good size to play the position. Knows how to use his size and athleticism to his benefit. Showed nice ability to consistently shoot the 3-pointer. Uses size to get inside and get more than his share of rebounds.

**Doudmy St. Hilaire (6-2 G/F) New Heights NYC/South Shore H.S.:** Athletic player who likes to go to the hoop, and can finish when he gets there. Gets into the lane at will with his strength/speed. Contributes many ways. Definitely at his best, though, when going hard to the basket. Also played some point guard.

**Justin McCarthur (6-0 G) Central Penn Ballers/Susuehanna Township:** Active and strong with both hands getting to the rim. Quick first step off the dribble. Showed no fear in driving to the hoop against bigger defenders and was able to finish.

**Shawn Reardon (6-3 F) Mass Premier Elite/Attleboro H.S.:** Strong body size and tough interior presence who is solid on the boards and can finish around the basket. Showed a nice perimeter touch in some games here, which could help him develop into a nice combo-forward over time.

**Tommy Banks (6-5 F) Franchise Ballers/Rochester East:** Solid post-up skills with strong hands and a nice touch from 10 feet and in. Athletic with good ability to run the court. Uses athleticism well on defense, especially to get up and be a nice shot-blocking threat.

**Stanley Foster (6-3 SF) Franchise Ballers/Bishop Kearney:** Lanky wing with good handle with either hand. Better slasher than shooter right now, but has decent range. Quick and slides his feet well on defense. Runs the floor hard, and has a high motor.

**Femi Olujobi (6-4 PF) Team Express/Brentwood H.S.:** Strong frame helps him be able to have his back to the basket and be successful against bigger defenders. Can step out and hit from mid range. Solid defender who uses his strong legs to hold his position well.

**Adnios De la Rosa (6-6 PF) Metro Hawks/Christ The King:** Big man (240 pounds) who uses his girth and strength to good use offensively to muscle all defenders. Also uses his body to get good positioning on the block on the defensive end.

**A.J. Williams (6-1 PG) Metro Hawks/Lincoln:** Runs out in transition well and uses quick first step to beat defenders. Strong and physical player. Inconsistent with his perimeter shot, although his outside game seemed to be there most of the time as the tournament progressed.

**Elisha Boone (6-3 SF) Metro Hawks/Bishop Loughlin:** High athleticism player with good motor who can score in a variety of ways. Can create off the ball, which is a valuable tool. Aggressive to the basket. Goes into traffic and finishes against contact.

**Nigel Carter (6-3 SF) LI Lightning Butler/St. Anthony's (L.I.):** Tough kid who showed consistent ability to step into the lane and weave his way successfully to the basket. Very good at creating offense for himself off the dribble.

**David Labossiere (6-1 SG) Mass Evolution/Stoneham H.S.:** Strong combo guard who can use both hands well. Can fight his way inside and also stop and connect on or off the dribble. Good defender who runs the court well and can get up to block a shot.

**Matt Cerutti (6-4 SF) Albany City Rocks-Black/Guilderland H.S.:** Consistent defender with good footwork and the ability to step out and hurt opponents from the perimeter. Has good long strides in going inside and was particularly good going left.

**Matt Knezovic (6-1 SG) Albany City Rocks-Black/Albany Academy:** Good shooter with deep range who was able to hit even with a hand in his face. Plays better off the ball and getting open off picks and screens. High motor. Can work inside surprisingly well.

**Sterling Tarlin (6-2 SG) Albany City Rocks-Black/Williamsville North H.S.:** Athletic with good, quick hands on defense. Strong presence in breaking down a defense. Very quick on the ball, but sometimes needs to slow down a little and let the game come to him.

**Isaiah Lee (5-10 PG) Team Scan/Iona Prep:** A true lock-down defender here. Good midrange game, but clearly preferred slashing his way to the basket. Used his tenacity on drives to beat defenders to the hoop.

**Garry Baumer (6-0 SG) N.J. Pirates/East Brunswick:** Lefty who is a pure shooter and works both sides of the court to get open. Works best coming around screens, but also solid at finding his own shot in up-tempo situations.

**Kevin Seymour (6-1 SG) Team Scan/Fay Academy:** Great ability to penetrate and score past a trapping defense. Probably at his best when he has the ball in his hands, but also showed the ability to play off the ball using his strength and quickness to succeed.

**Alex Wolfe (6-7 C) New Heights-NYC/Hackley School:** Already prototypical big-man's body. Runs floor well and uses his length to intimidate and discourage shooters. Moves well for a big guy. Crashes boards hard. Keeps the ball high after rebounds.

**Keon Wilson (6-1 SG) Rhode Island Hawks/La Salle:** Good athletic ability with quick first step going either way. Plays well in the half court and is seemingly able to get to the basket with ease and finish with either hand.

**Jason Ganley (6-4 PF) Blackstone Valley Chaos/Northbridge:** Strong with back to the basket or on put-backs around the rim. Did a nice job keeping the ball in spots to help maintain possession. Strong lower body helps him stick in the post when posting up.

**Akbar Hoffman (5-11 PG) N.J. Roadrunners/Patterson Eastside:** Strong with the ball. Good pull-up jumper that fell often. Goes strong to the basket and showed great court vision in finding open teammates. Prolific scorer with very good point guard skills.

**Ismael Sanogo (6-5 SF) N.J. Roadrunners/Patterson Eastside:** Long wing player who is strong enough to be his team's best rebounder as well. Has a strong handle which made him a big match-up problem for all opponents.

**Jake Dadika (6-1 SG) N.J. Pirates/St. Joseph's:** Able to get to the rim and also shoot from the perimeter. Not overly athletic but can deceptively beat defenders, especially going right. Came up big in one game as opponent respected his shot and he got into the lane.

**Ben Hackett (6-2 SG) Syracuse Select/Bishop Ludden:** Very good at taking the ball to the basket. Excellent cross-over move and showed poing guard skills which made him even tougher to defend. Slight frame. Should get better with added strength/bulk.

**Jeremy Bonafacio (6-4 PF) NYC Jaguars/IS 285:** Lanky with good positioning skills inside. Finishes around the rim with contact. Playing up an age division and fit right in. Stepped out and proved to be able to stick the mid-range jumper.

**Tom Sweeney (6-6 PF) Rising Stars/Don Bosco Prep:** True big man with good post-up skills who fought inside on every play. Controlled the glass in the second half against a bigger Sports U team. Decent touch from 10 feet and in. Solid footwork, and soft hands.

**Jack Boucher (5-11 PG) Mass Bearcats/Newton North:** Standout point guard who was also a good spot-up shooter with a hand in his face. Outstanding pressure defender and got his hands into the passing lanes with regularity to force turnovers.

**Paul Jorgensen (6-2 SG) Rising Stars-Red/Don Bosco:** Already college-ready body. Good handle in open court and good passer. Good shooter who also goes hard to the hoop. Uses height effectively to operate inside, too.

**Kevin Deegan (6-6 F) Rising Stars/Pearl River:** Long arms and nice-looking long-range form. Also works hard on boards. Slender player, but really bangs. Looks like he'll be a very good power forward when he grows into his frame.

**Paul Burke (5-6 PG) Rising Stars-Red/Monroe-Woodbury H.S.:** Small in stature, but big on the offensive end. Deadly accurate from 3-point territory. Outstanding court vision. He sees the next pass before catching the ball. Creates havoc on the defensive end.

**Tler Desrosiers (6-0 PG) Mass Hoops Jaguars/Agawam H.S.:** Decent size for his position. Showed long-range shooting ability. Exhibited good court vision and delivered passes to open teammates. Made good decision. Threads needle with passes.

**Zack Heeman (6-6 C) N.J. Panthers/Mt. Olive H.S.:** Solid, 230-pound developing wide body. A true center. Uses strength well, and gets off shots with either hand in close. Works hard and runs the court well for his size. Showed mid-range jumper. Good hands. Rebounds and looks to outlet.

**Amir Washington (5-8 PG) N.J. Panthers/Morristown H.S.:** Outstanding first step allows him to get into the paint. Nice floater in the lane. Good enough outside shot to keep defenders honest. Effective passer, particularly when finding teammates on the fast break.

**Brendan O'Shea (5-6 PG) Sea Cougars/Burlington H.S.:** Extremely slender, but overcomes that with prototypical point-guard skill set. Very unselfish player, but made 3's when left open. Extremely smart player. Mistake free, as befits the son of a former college coach. True floor general who could become a D-I player with additional size.

**Jack Wharton (6-3 SF) Mass Bearcats/Newton North:** Nice wing player who got to the glass. He also showed an ability to draw out defenders and, then, beat them off the dribble. Surprisingly quick moves and good with either hand.

**Anthony Vernon (6-6 PF) New Heights/Bishop Loughlin):** Uses his wide frame to his benefit and was able to post up and get in good spots to catch the ball. Soft hands for a big guy. Showed the ability to finish up on put-backs.

**Tyler Drews (6-0 PG) N.J. Shoreshots/Old Bridge H.S.:** Good handle and court vision. Uses his length effectively on defense. Plays hard at all times. Good anticipation and court sense. Goes hard to the hoop. Good use of ball fakes. Drives to the basket and dishes. Good hands on defensive end. Nice perimeter shot.

## **15:U Honorable Mention All-GymRat CHALLENGE**

Shavar Newkirk (5-11 PG) Team Scan  
Kiernan Hamilton (5-9 PG) NYC Jaguars  
Liam Bruno (6-3 PF) Mass Bearcats  
Tyshawn Miles (6-7 C) New Heights-NYC  
Chandler Benson (6-7 C) Southern Tier  
Cameron Dean (6-4 SF) Southern Tier  
Mike Fasano (5-1 PG) N.J. Shoshorts  
David Hawthorne (6-4 F) N.J. Roadrunners  
Jordan Nelson (5-10 G) Albany City Rocks-Orange  
Travis Cook (6-1 F) BC Eagles  
Jack Ely (6-3 F) NY Falcons  
Troy McLaughlin (6-1 PG) NY Falcons  
Marquis Holman (6-2 F) MABC Bengals  
Shaquille Evans (6-1 G) MABC Bengals  
Isaiah Francis (6-3 F) Firm Elite-Walker  
Joseph LoStracco (6-6 C) PKA  
Tom Rush (5-9 PG) PKA  
Pavin Parrish (G) Lone Wolf  
Tremaine Elder (6-2) LI Lightning-Melone  
Jakwan Jones (6-4 F) Newburgh Zion Lions  
Van Orlanda (5-11 PG) BS Chaos  
Jordan Jachim (5-6 PG), LVBS ELITE  
Pat Dorrian (5-10 PG) Kinston Komets  
Chris Saitch (6-1 F) Kingston Komets  
Edson Dascy (6-3 F) RI Hawks  
Jauan Hollingshed (6-5 F) Brooklyn Badgers  
Justin Silva (6-4 F) Brooklyn Badgers  
Stewart Wright (5-6 PG) Syracuse Select  
Henry Hopwood (6-0 G) Schenectady Patriots  
Phil Levine-Caleb (6-2 F) Mass Bearcats  
Cameron Smith (5-7 PG) East Coast Fusion  
Greg Manney (5-9 SG) Lake Champlain Lakers  
Jamil Hood (6-0 PG) City Rocks Black  
Josh Arrington (6-8 C/F) LI Lightning  
Ryan Richard (6-2 F) Mass Evolution  
Travis Dickerson (6-0 G) LI Lightning

Joe Cremo (6-1 PG) Scotia  
Paul Pandolfi (6-2 G/F) Rising Stars Blue  
Dominic Antonelli (6-0 PG) Central Penn Ballers  
Christopher Wright (6-8 C) Sports U Team IZOD  
Devine Eke (6-6 F) Sports U Team IZOD  
Tyree Sykes (6-5 F) Sports U Team IZOD  
Connor Ceh (6-1 F) LVBS  
Tommie Banks (6-5 C) Rochester Franchise Ballers  
Paul Emdin (6-1 G) Frenji  
Issaih Moore (6-2 F) Team Express  
Matt Staubi (5-7 PG) Frenji  
Patrick Smith (6-3 F) PKA  
Christian Wilkens (6-1 F) Mass Bearcats  
Alex Hilger (6-0 G) Mass Bearcats  
Tariki Smith (5-11 PG) Sports U Team IZOD

## 14:U Age Division

### Emerging Young Talent Lead Conn. Elite To GymRat Championship

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. – The first year of 14-under age bracket competition for the GymRat CHALLENGE brought a considerable amount of young talent into the upstate New York area, and a good portion of it helped the Connecticut Elite capture the division's tournament championship.

The Elite was deep in talent and tall in the frontcourt, a blend that was tough for opponents in the field to contend with over the two-day event.

There was arguably no player more promising than 6-foot-2 Elite forward Justin Campbell, who put up a division's best 33 points in his team's toughest contest, a 77-69 semifinal-round victory over the Syracuse SELECT.

The Elite had no such problem in the championship game, earning a 66-39 decision over a solid, but smaller, Ottawa Phoenix club.

Campbell's silky smooth style of play and athletic ability was reminiscent of former Siena College standout Edwin Ubiles, and Campbell's play here might have been a harbinger of a career that, one day, will match Ubiles' at the college level.

Campbell wasn't the only dominating front-court player for his program. Marcus Blackwell, a 6-1 power forward who also has small-forward skills, had 20 points in the semifinal-round victory. Blackwell, though, only played portions of the championship game after suffering a thigh bruise.

But Campbell and other front-courtiers 6-3 Nick Esposito and 6-footer Thomas Nolan helped Campbell control the paint in the title contest, while guard Clinton "C.J." Davidson contributed from the perimeter with 12 points.

It was more than enough for the Elite to run out to a 35-12 lead early in the second half and, then, coast in for the victory over Ottawa.

Clearly, though, the Connecticut team was about more than just a prolific offensive attack.

"Our key was that we played very good defense," said Campbell.

Connecticut's victory here, too, was anything but a surprise.

Program coach Carl Bethea said his squad has won all four tournaments it has been involved in so far this spring and, counting other AAU games it has played in over the past 10 months has won 72 consecutive games.

"Actually, we were going to put this team in the 15-under bracket until they opened up the 14-under division this year," said Bethea. "But, we thought we could compete at the next level, too."

Because many of Bethea's players are still in junior high school, they play for the Elite AAU program year round.

"We've been together since September, so that helps," Bethea added. "The kids stay together, they know how to play together and they play hard."

All of that was on display this weekend at the GymRat CHALLENGE, and so was continuation of the program's lengthy run of success.

## **14:U All-GymRat CHALLENGE MVG – Most Valuable GymRat**

**Justin Campbell (6-2 PF) Connecticut Elite/King Robbins:** This big man cleans up everything on the boards. Long and strong, attributes that make him very difficult to defend. A powerful force when rebounding. Has ability to defend low post and perimeter. Good low-post moves. Nice shooting touch out to 12 feet. Moves very well without the ball. Good athleticism for his size. Dominant at this level. Should be fun to watch how much he can progress.

## **14:U All-GymRat CHALLENGE TEAM**

**Loberin Figalo (5-10 G) Basketball 2 The Limit:** A guard that is able to create off the dribble and push the ball up the floor. Has good court vision and can handle the ball. Skills that allow him to play either guard position. Strong to the basket and finishes with both hands.

**Clinton "CJ" Davidson (5-9 PG/SG) Connecticut Elite/Curial School:** A combo guard that can do it all. He will push the tempo while maintaining composure. Has a very good stop-and-pop that is difficult to defend. A very creative guard that gets to the hoop. Very fast on defense with active hands that result in steals and creates scoring opportunities for him.

**Marcus Blackwell (6-1 SF) Connecticut Elite/Blackham School:** Keep him on your radar because he does it all. A big body that can dribble, pass and rebound. An all-around player. Good close-out ability. He is all over the floor. Has shot-blocking ability. Doesn't make many mistakes. Will not take a bad jump shot.

**Pat Sheehan (5-6 PG) Central Jersey Rebels/St. Benedicts Prep:** Unbelievable ball handle. Very quick guard that can create shots. Has 3-point range. Loves to push the floor. Great court vision. Does a nice job limiting turnover. Nice in-rhythm jump shot.

**Jumanne McGee (5-9 SG) Central Jersey Rebels/Orange Middle School:** Lightning-quick guard that is effective at both ends of the court. Possesses great court awareness for his age. Outstanding shooter who can already step back behind 3-point line and connect.

**Kai Mitchell (6-3 C) Rockland Rockets/Filstone Secondary:** Good-sized big man. Very court savvy. Starts the break well. Closes out well as a defender. Sees the floor very well. Places himself very well when facing the hoop.

**Malik Johnson (6-0 SF) Rockland Rockets/Highland Falls Middle School:** This combo guard plays well with his back to the basket. Plays the high post effectively. Very polished low-post moves for a guard. Very versatile player who can contribute from anywhere on the court.

**Ismael Kaba (6-1 SG) Ottawa Phoenix/Sir Robert Borden H.S.:** Good defensive player. Extremely fast. He comes up with steals. Has active hands. An all-out player who plays that way all the time. Can create his own shot. Sees the floor well.

**Hanad Yusuf (5-1 PG) Ottawa Phoenix/Louis Riel H.S.:** All hustle as a point guard. Single-handedly kept his team in two games. Can score, but his main focus is to distribute to open teammates. Very quick, and uses that trait well on the defensive end. Causes turnovers.

**Paul Bischoff (6-1 F) Oneonta Hoosiers/Oneonta H.S.:** An all-out hustler. Good size for his age. Will attack the rim for every rebound. Double-digit scorer in every game here, primarily because of his ability to out-position opponents.

**Marquel Fraiser (5-10 Wing) UPlay:** A good-sized two-guard/small forward who fights hard for position. Good ball-handling ability. He sees the floor very well. A true scorer with a nice offensive touch around the rim.

**Zach Walser (6-3 C) Syracuse Select/Bishop Ludden:** Good size with great court vision. Rebounds well and starts the break very well. Runs the floor every time. Doesn't block many shots, but does create difficulty for penetrating guards. Effective jump hook.

**Jeff Lobello (5-9 PG) Syracuse Select/Westhill H.S.:** At a young age already showing ability as a true point guard. A leader on the court. He encourages fellow teammates while directing the flow of the game. Good passer and limits turnovers.

## **14:U Honorable Mention All-GymRat CHALLENGE**

Josiah Wilson (5-2 PG) Connecticut Elite

Thomas Nolan (6-0 G) Connecticut Elite

Gillian Smith (5-11 G) B2L

Sam Jenkins (5-1 G) UPlay

Mamadou Traore (6-3 F) Pure BBall

Stephen Gagnier (5-4 G) Mass Premier

Ricky McGill (5-7 G) Rockland Rockets

Marquan Newman (6-2 F) Anaconda All Stars

Chase Ta (5-9 G) Central Jersey Rebels

Eric Slade (5-9 G) Central Jersey Rebels

Dennis Bailer (5-7 G) Prodigy

Andrew Taliafarro (5-9 G) Prodigy

Dylan Kelly (5-9 G) NY Falcons

## 13:U Age Division

### Tradition Encourages New Heights-NYC to Excel, Earn GymRat Crown

SARATOGA SPRINGS, NY – New Heights-NYC’s AAU program coach Artie Cox is a well-known face around the summer circuit and the list of players who have played under him over the years is an impressive one.

Names like Lamar Odom, Speedy Claxton, Erik Barkley and Ron Artest are just a few who have spent developmental years under teams Cox has been involved with. And, the coach isn’t averse to reminding his current players that those who have come before them have gone on to some pretty special things.

Among those listening closely is 5-foot-7 point guard Jared Rivers, currently a seventh-grader at Long Island Lutheran Middle School, another program with a storied basketball tradition.

Rivers believes that if he can continue to work hard he just might be another basketball success story that started under the tutelage of Cox. And, Rivers isn’t exactly aiming low.

“I’d like to eventually play at North Carolina,” he said.

His play here that helped New Heights win the 13-under division of the GymRat tournament with a 66-44 victory over the Stamford Peace in the championship game here at the Saratoga Recreation Center didn’t do anything to diminish his hopes.

Rivers wasn’t his team’s leading scorer here. That designation went to 5-11 forward and teammate Terrell Turner, who had a game-high 25 points in the championship contest. But Rivers contributed double-figure points in every game here, while running New Heights from his point guard position with the effectiveness of a well-seasoned veteran.

“He’s a sharp kid,” said Cox, about Rivers.

Sharp enough to know that team play, and not individual performances, usually figures prominently in winning games.

“That was our key here,” said Cox. “We played well together. We moved the ball around.”

Rivers put it another way: “We’re very loyal to each other in a team sense,” he said. “This is very exciting for us to come up here and win.”

It’s very exciting, too, for Rivers and his teammates to know the past successes of players who have come through programs that Cox has been involved in previously and to know they’ve got a chance for success of their own.

“Some of our former players come back and talk to the kids,” said Cox. “And our guys know who came through before them. They see how well some of my former players have done, that a lot of them have

gone on to play at a high level in high school, in college and, even, in the pros. Our kids want to emulate that.”

To do that, though, requires more than just on-court ability.

Players in the New Heights program also are required to pay extra attention to academics, and the program has an academic session prior to each of its practices.

“We bring a tutor in to help the kids with their work, or whatever they need,” said Cox.

That formula is a proven success. And, now, the youngest members of the New Heights program competing here, in the inaugural version of the 13-under division of the GymRat CHALLENGE, appear to be on their way to continuing the program’s division of excellence.

### **13:U All-GymRat CHALLENGE MVG –Most Valuable GymRat**

**Jared Rivers (5-7 G) New Heights-NYC/Long Island Lutheran Middle School:** A lights-out shooter from long range, this guard just has “it.” Able to pull up from left hand or the right. Sees the court very well and distributes. A lock-down defender with great lateral movement. A very good passer, capable of playing either guard position.

### **13:U All-GymRat CHALLENGE TEAM**

**Armani Rivera (5-6 SG) Stamford Peace:** A real contributor. A slasher who gets to the rim with ease. Due to his hustle, this guard finds himself in many scoring opportunities. Seen to be more of an offensive player right now, but he will play hard defense.

**Jalen Latta (5-10 SG) Stamford Peace:** A true scorer that is also willing to distribute to teammates. A consistent double-digit scorer who can score inside and out. A patient ball-handler that can go right or left. Great body control for a young player. As a defender he is always the first one back.

**Kweshon Askew (6-3 C) Stamford Peace:** Still growing, he has the makings of a truly talented center. Long and moves well without the ball. Often leads the fst break. Able to score with both hands with great low-post moves. Defensively he is a shot-blocker and forces opponents to make bad decisions.

**Vincent DiCaterino (5-9 PF) Albany City Rocks/Broadalbin:** A patient big man who lets the game come to him. Has a nice 10-to-15 foot jumper that he doesn’t force. He looks to distribute from the high post at all times. A good defender and is very physical.

**Quincy Kane (5-5 SG) Connecticut Bulldogs/Wilson Middle School:** An explosive 2-guard that can step back and pop from long range. Very quick with the ball and makes very good offensive

decisions. Can finish with either hand. Defensively he has quick hands and moves his feet very well.

**Kaleb Downing (5-2 PG) Connecticut Bulldogs/Capital Prep:** A very court-savvy guard that is always looking ahead. Sees the floor extremely well. Already shows great poise and leadership ability. True point guard who looks to make the extra pass.

**Mekhi Mickens (5-0 PG/SG) Connecticut Bulldogs/Wilson Middle School:** An exciting guard that can create shots for himself. Has great court awareness with the ability to go to the rack with either hand. Gets on the floor for loose balls. Showed great defensive hustle here.

**Rashan Gary (6-3 C) Team N.J. Select Stars/Park Middle School:** A true big man for his age group. Runs the entire floor. Not shy about getting dirty and banging around the rim. A lunch-pail guy who comes to work. Will dive for loose balls. Very active defender. Blocks many shots. Defense is his specialty right now.

**Tyrone Cohen Jr. (6-0 F) New Heights-NYC/Incarnation School:** Has a great touch around the rim. An all-around player. Hustles on every play. A lefty that plays well facing or with his back to the basket. He seems, at an early age, to have perfected an off-handed jump hook. Tenacious on defense with good close-out ability.

**Terrell Turner (5-11 F) New Heights-NYC/Isaac Newton School:** Terrific player at both ends of the court. Great defender with very active hands. Consistent scorer due to his constant movement on the offensive end. Runs the floor very well and can finish. Top scorer on his team in both the semifinal round and championship game, when he had 25 points.

### **13:U Honorable Mention All-GymRat CHALLENGE**

Armani Rivers (5-7 G) Stamford Peace

Kaleb Downing (5-2 PG) Connecticut Bulldogs

Patrick Kerins (5-5 F) Connecticut Bulldogs

Jase Garcia (5-9 F) Connecticut Bulldogs

Jason Graham (6-1 F) N.J. Select

Elijah Mitchell (5-5 SG) N.J. Select

Jeffery Merchant (6-3 C) N.Y. Pride

Brandon Redndo (4-11 PG) N.Y. Pride

Chris Middleton (5-8 G) New Heights

Noah Schwenzfeier (5-6 SF) Albany City Rocks

Dejea Johnson (5-1 PG) Albany City Rocks

Langston Lanier (5-11 PF) Albany City Rocks