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## **2009 GymRat CHALLENGE Titles to Long Island, Albany, NYC**

ALBANY, N.Y. – The fifth annual GIRL'S GymRat CHALLENGE AAU basketball tournament not only got bigger this year, attracting a record number 156 teams to the event, but it also got better showcasing a field that was LOADED with talent.

Already entrenched as one of the top events on the summer basketball calendar for girls, the level of play and overall talent here this season in games played at Siena College and the University at Albany was recognized as stronger than it has ever been.

Teams representing 12 states and two Canadian provinces had rosters filled with the best-of-the-best, showcasing dozens of players who will go on to play at high-major levels, hundreds who will eventually wind up at some Division I level and many others whose presence will be felt within Division II and Division III programs in future years.

A record turnout in spectators got to see players on the rise here at the 16-under, 15-under and 14-under age brackets and, in future years, will no doubt be able to say "I saw them when..."

They also saw highly competitive battles along the way to fittingly hard-fought conclusions that crowned champions at all three age levels over the two-day event.

The championship results were a clear case of something old/something new.

Something new? That would be the Long Island Xtreme's 16-under division team winning a title with a roster of players who played "up" for the previous two years and advanced to the bracket's semifinal round before elimination in both 2008 and 2007

The Xtreme, though, grabbed the proverbial brass ring this time, getting past traditional GymRat CHALLENGE powerhouse program the New York Gauchos, the two-time defending division titlist.

There was a blend of something old/something new at the 15-under level as the Albany Capitals became the first local-based team to win the title since the event's initial year of play in 2005. That success was new for current players, but not out of the ordinary for the program that also captured a GymRat championship in 2005.

And, there was definitely something old at the 14-under level as the perennial powerhouse New York Gauchos showed off its brand of talent, overall physical ability and court smarts to rally from a 12-point halftime deficit in the championship game to capture an unprecedented third straight title at the 14-under division.

## **16:U Age Division: Long Island Xtreme Claims Crown (Finally)**

It wasn't hard to spot the happiest coach in the gym late Sunday night at the end of the GymRat CHALLENGE girls' AAU tournament. That would have been Long Island Xtreme's head man Tom Flynn, who put on a post-championship game fist-pumping exhibition worthy of New York Met reliever K-Rod's best celebratory work after a difficult save.

Who could blame Flynn for being just a little ecstatic? The nucleus of his team had been playing at the 16-under level of the GymRat CHALLENGE tournament for the past two years and had been eliminated both years in the semifinal round of play.

But, the third time was the charm. No longer the proverbial bridesmaid and, finally, a bride for the Xtreme, which earned a 42-34 victory over the New York Gauchos in the division's championship game played at Siena College.

And, to become a champion Flynn's team had to beat one. The Gauchos are traditionally one of the best AAU programs in the nation and had captured the GymRat CHALLENGE division title in each of the past two years.

But, not this time as the Xtreme's players finally captured their own previously elusive championship.

It wasn't easy even getting to the title game, though. The champs needed big efforts from Boston College-bound guard Kristen Doherty, the division's MVP (Most Valuable GymRat), who responded with a 32-point performance in the semifinal round and a 26-point effort in the quarterfinal round.

Doherty added 19 in the championship game and the Xtreme also got strong inside play from 6-2 center and Vanderbilt-bound Tori Jarosz.

The Gauchos, though, held a 31-30 lead with about four minutes left in the title contest before Xtreme point guard Shannon Flynn drained a three-pointer, and teammate Elizabeth Hauser followed with a put-back on the team's next possession to give the winners a four-point edge and the lead for good.

"This feels terrific," said Tom Flynn. "It just seemed that we came close every year, but couldn't get over the top."

A core of four of the Xtreme players, Doherty, Flynn, Sarah Kluth and Caitlin Hopkins have played AAU ball together since they were all fourth-graders.

"We're just this little team and we probably don't look like much in warm-ups, but it's totally different when the game begins," added Flynn.

And while Flynn was enamored by finally getting a GymRat CHALLENGE championship, his players had an additional reason to rejoice.

"As our reward, Coach Flynn told us that we'd skip our next scheduled practice," said Doherty. "That really made us happy."

"His practices are really intense and hard. Every time I'm on my way to practice I'm dreading it. But once we get going it makes me realize how much it helps us, and this is the proof."

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

**Kristen Doherty 5-9 Guard (Long Island Xtreme/ Sachem East H.S.):** Lefty sharpshooter who has displayed this event's sweetest shooting touch for three straight years. Can connect from long range, or on the way to the basket with a quick first step. She knows how to break down a defender. Also can handle the ball and is a very good passer. Good rebounder from the guard position. She scored 32 points in the semifinal round, 26 in the quarterfinals and 19 in the championship contest. After heavy pursuit from the ACC and Big East, Doherty has already committed to attend Boston College.

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

**Briana Kiesel 5-7 Combo Guard (Albany City Rocks/Utica Proctor H.S.):** Athletic, explosive combo guard. Extremely quick in the open court. Has nice pull-up jumper, nice hesitation move to get to the rim. Has good body control. Finishes in transition. Gets after it defensively. Constantly working on both ends. Has a lot of the intangibles any coach looks for. Great feel for the game. UConn and several other Big East schools, and Stanford have shown interest.

**Rachel Coffey, 5-6 Combo Guard (Albany City Rocks/Kingston H.S.):** Athletic combo guard who is great in the open court. She gets to the rim with ease and finishes, yet has three-point shooting range. Very good body control with a good handle. Very active defender who does not back away from physical play. Major college interest coming from Rutgers, Louisville, Kentucky, Temple.

**Monica Wignot 6-2 Guard/Forward (Firm AC/Holy Redeemer H.S.):** Good-sized combo guard/small forward who plays under control and handles the ball well for her size. Very nice touch out to 3-point range. Multi-talented player. Very good passer. Sees the floor well and is a smart player. Fundamentally sound. Has good timing on blocks, good instincts and a great feel for the game. Siena is among several mid-majors showing interest.

**Jamie Insel 6-2 Center (United N.J. Navy/Voorhees H.S.):** Good instincts around the hoop on both ends of the court. Good rebounder on both ends. Defensively, she grabs the ball with force and outlets it quickly to get transition game moving. Good size, skills.

**Breanna Stewart 6-3 Center (Syracuse Stars/Cicero-North Syracuse H.S.):** A freshman playing "up" two levels. Still slender, but that doesn't hinder her. Jumping ability off the chart for her age. She punishes in the paint at both ends. Quick release, or a good fake are the only way to get a shot off against her. She had 12 blocks in one game here, and affected many others. Uses both hands. Will wind up at a major college.

**Martina Ellerbe 6-2 Forward (N.Y. Gauchos/St. Mary's H.S.):** Slender player who can play either forward position. Good finisher around the basket and very active on the boards at both ends. An athletic player who runs the floor well in transition. Showed the ability to shoot well from the perimeter, out to beyond the 3-point stripe. Active on-the-ball defender. Appears headed to play at Ohio State.

**Charmaine Tay 5-9 Guard (N.Y. Gauchos/Bloomfield Tech H.S.):** Very quick, and uses that ability to get through defenses. Excellent ballhandler who can score or dish it off. She goes hard

to the hoop. Can play either guard spot. Smart, unselfish passer but outstanding shooter from anywhere on the court. She was MVG on the 14-under level here in 2007.

**Taylor Palmer 5-6 Guard (N.Y. Gauchos/Mt. Vernon H.S.):** The MVG of the 15-under bracket a year ago, she showed that her game has continued to progress. A pure 3-point shooter who combines athleticism and strength to be a tough rebounder. Also a good passer on the break. Good mid-range game, as well. Scored a tournament-best 38 points in a pool game.

**Laurin Mincy 6-0 Guard/Forward (New Jersey Sparks/University H.S.):** Capable of playing shooting guard or forward, she has all the tools. Can shoot from 3-point range, yet get inside to score, too. Uses her athleticism to be disruptive on defense. Offensively she makes things happen by going past defenders and scoring, or finding teammates. Justifiably being recruited at the highest level.

**Taylor Ford 6-0 Forward (Exodus United/St. Michael's Academy):** Very athletic inside performer who uses her skills to block shots and track down rebounds. Very active inside at both ends. Aggressive player. She also has a good shot inside the paint. Hearing from Big East schools.

**Rachel Bantelman 5-5 Guard (Crystal City Stars/Olean H.S.):** A threat to score from anywhere on the court. Deadly shooter. Also quick enough to get past defenders and drive to the basket and finish with no problem. Uses quickness and athleticism to be a quality defender.

**Tori Jarosz 6-2 Center (Long Island Xtreme/Lakeland H.S.):** Strong, solid build who uses her size well inside, yet also runs the court well. Very good basic skills around the basket. Good hands, makes the tough catch. Rugged inside player with a knack for putting the ball in the basket. Has already committed to Vanderbilt.

**Lauren Okafor 6-2 Center (Ring City-Walter/Hopkins Prep):** Coachable player who runs the floor very well. Knows how to seal off defenders and works hard in the post. Plays both ends of the floor. Good rebounder who secures the ball and, then, looks to outlet quickly. Runs the floor well for her size. Getting looks from high majors.

**Shakurah Washington 5-3 Guard (Ring City-Walter/Murry Bergtrum H.S.):** Her end-to-end speed makes her tough for anyone to guard. Yet she plays quickly without being out of control. Very good decision-maker. Also exhibited an above-average outside shot. Makes very quick, hard passes that are tough to intercept.

**Shannon Flynn 5-7 Guard (LI Xtreme-St Mary's-Manhasset H.S.):** This 1<sup>st</sup> Team ALL CHSAA performer is the proverbial "coach on the floor". Handles and distributes making the stars around her even more efficient and effective. Heady and steady point guard who is adept at translating coach's (/Dad's) intensity into an unflappable on-court presence. Tough competitor who provides the intangible glue that is necessary for any championship team to reach its potential. Also demonstrated an ability to penetrate by seemingly quicker defenders and to knock down jumpers consistently.

**Daisha Simmons 5-9 Forward (Ring City-Walter/St. Bernard Gill H.S.):** Athletic wing player with a feathery soft shooting touch. Very quick hands on defense. Plays hard at both ends of the court. Shoots well from the outside, but can also get to the basket with ease and finish once she gets there.

**Taylor Leonard 5-6 Guard (Kingston Vipers/John A. Coleman H.S.):** Very good 3-point shooter. When defenders play up on here she can go past them and get to the basket. Plays very hard at both ends of the court. Capable of playing either guard spot.

**Bria Hartley 5-9 Forward (Exodus/North Babylon):** Standout 3-point shooter just adds to her package as one of the nation's top point guard prospects. She runs a team like a coach on the floor. Great quickness. Constantly pushes the ball, yet can pull up on a dime to get off a mid-range jumper. Can take her choice of major-college offers.

**Krystal Forthan 6-4 Center (Exodus-NYC/Thomas Jefferson, Oregon):** True "big" who can just dominate inside. Terrific hands, good leaping ability and uses those skills to control the boards. Runs the floor well for size. Attempted a dunk here on a breakaway and just missed it. Has an effective mid-range jumper. Hearing from Tennessee, UConn, Rutgers, LSU and many others.

**Cori Coleman 5-8 Guard (New Heights White/Murry Bergtraum H.S.):** Showed an above-average understanding of the game. Showed the ability here to play either guard position. Very good shooter, yet has a good enough handle to play the point. Good passer, too.

**Sabrina Jeridore 6-3 Center (N.Y. Xplosion-Elite/Francis Lewis H.S.):** Very good size. True center. Excellent defender not only in the paint, but on the ball in the half court. Can score inside, including against other players her size. Very good hands. No problems catching the ball in traffic. Also an above-average rebounder.

**Sade Jackson 5-8 Guard (New Heights White/Aquinas H.S.):** Quick, athletic point guard who can also play off-guard. Decent handle, uses cross-over and hesitation move to get to the hoop. Excellent in transition. Sees the floor, always looking for open teammate. Good passer, defender. Very active and hustles after loose balls.

**Kelly Robinson 5-7 Point Guard (NY Explosion-Elite/Francis Lewis H.S.):** Small, quick point guard who sees the floor and passes ahead. Flashed ability to hit occasional 3-pointer. Aggressive on defense and gets into passing lanes. Has good speed to go past defenders and get to the rim. Also creates for teammates.

**Kastine Evans 5-9 Guard/Forward (NY Xplosion-Elite/Norwich Free Academy):** Athletic combo guard who also can play the three spot. Pushes the tempo in transition and can get to the hoop and finish. Has a nice shoot to 3-point range. Elevates on shot. Changes speeds well and finishes in transition. Versatile player who makes teammates better. Aggressive defender who is very active. Marquette and several A-10 schools have interest.

**Betnijah Laney 6-0 Forward (Philly Triple Threat/Smyrna H.S.):** The MVP of the 14-under level last year, she skipped a level and still dominated. She had a 20-point half in the quarterfinal round. An inside force, she has added a good jumper to her offensive arsenal. Plays extremely hard. Good spin move and kiss-off-the-glass move from the block. Outstanding defensive player. A certain high-major recruit.

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

Nikki Works 6-0 Center (Albany City Rocks/Nottingham H.S.)  
Ati Waberte 5-1 Point Guard (Exodus United/North Babylon H.S.)  
Kyra Aloizos 6-1 Center (NY Xplosion-Elite/Archbishop Molloy H.S.)  
Naquasha "Shy" Britton 5-11 Forward (WNY Lady Titans/Greece Acadia)  
Alyssa Englert 5-8 Combo Guard (WNY Lady Titals/Wayland Cohocton H.S.)  
Ati Wabiyn, 5-1 Guard (Exodus United/North Babylon H.S.)  
Grace Hodges 5-10 Forward (Orange County Elite/Chapel Field H.S.)  
Shayra Brown 5-10 Guard (N.Y. Exodus/Bishop Ford H.S.)  
Emily Tapio 5-11 Guard/Forward (NY Pride-Aldo/Brewster H.S.)  
Ann Kelsey 5-11 Forward (N.Y. Pride-Aldo/Yorktown H.S.)  
Corissa Younghans 5-6 Guard (United N.J. Navy/Roxbury H.S.)  
Emily Cristaldi 5-6 Guard (United N.J. Navy/Summit H.S.)  
Shanyce Stewart 6-1 Forward (N.Y. Gauchos/Mt. Vernon)  
Raeshonn Corbo 5-7 Point Guard (N.Y. Gauchos/Paramus Catholic H.S.)  
Allison Mullings 5-9 Guard/Forward (CT Storm 16 Premier/Northwest Catholic)  
Alexandra Jones 6-2 Center (CT Storm 16 Premier/South Kingston H.S.)  
Sara Bender 6-0 Center (Kingston Vipers/Walkkill H.S.)  
Taylor Leonard 5-6 Point Guard (Kingston Vipers/John A. Coleman H.S.)  
Melody O'Connor 5-11 Forward (Kingston Vipers/John A. Coleman H.S.)  
Ruth Vargas 5-11 Forward (Team Noah/Brentwood H.S.)  
Leane Urbancik 6-0 Forward (Team Noah/Smithwood West)  
Taylor Clark 6-0 Center (Crystal City/Athens H.S.)  
Allyson DiMagno 5-10 Forward (Crystal City/Fairport)  
Leanne Ockenden 5-9 Forward (Syracuse Stars/CBA)  
Erica Wright 6-0 Center (N.E. Lady Panthers/Westford Academy)  
Alexandra Guidi 5-8 Guard (N.H. Shooting Strs/Pinkerton)  
Melissa Geigerich 6-5 Center (NH Shooting Stars/Tabor Academy)  
Melissa Repoli 5-9 Forward (Central Jersey Hawks/St. John Vianney H.S.)  
Kelly Legg 6-2 Center (Rochester Warriors/Aquinas Institute)  
Devin Spirka 5-8 Guard (Albany City Rocks/Twin Valley H.S.)  
Katie Duma 6-1 Forward (Albany Capitals/Averill Park H.S.)  
Shakena Richardson 5-3 Point Guard (Jersey Shore Diamond/Neptune H.S.)  
Syessence Davis 5-6 Guard (Jersey Shore Diamond/Neptune H.S.)  
Courtney Murach 6-0 Forward (Bay State Blizzard-Navy/Meuthen)  
Ann Kelsey 5-11 Forward (NY Pride-Aldo/Yorktown)  
Simmons Thomas 6-1 Center (Team Noah/Roosevelt)  
Jasmine Lytle 6-1 Center (FBC Defenders/New BrunswickZ)  
Carissa Milley 5-6 Guard (Bay State Blizzard/Peabody)  
Alexandra Jones 6-2 Center (CT Storm Premier/South Kingston H.S.)  
Bre Statton 5-8 Forward (Empire Nighthawks/Albany H.S.)  
Sydni Crawford 5-4 Guard (Ring City-Harper/Teaneck)  
Dominique Pagan 6-1 Center (New Height-White/St. Annes of Belfield)  
Lessa Dunn 6-3 Center (Ring City-Walter/Eastern Commerce)  
Laray Drayton 5-8 Guard (New Height-White/Murry Bergtraum)  
Rachel Roberts 5-11 Forward (Ct Cobras/Mercy H.S.)  
Mariah Lesure 6-0 Forward (Mass Frenzy/Amherst Regional H.S.)  
Shayna Gerald 5-3 Guard (N.J. Sparks/Patterson John F. Kennedy)  
Shanice Hawkins 5-9 Forward (N.J. Sparks)  
Briyonna Canty 5-9 Forward (Philly Triple Threat/Trenton Catholic H.S.)

Tiffany Turner 6-1 Center (Philly Triple Threat/Cherokee H.S.)  
Lauren Battista 6-0 Center (Mass Premier-Bliss/Oliver Ames H.S.)

## **15:U Age Division: Team Play, Depth Carry Capitals to Crown**

GymRat CHALLENGE championships don't always go to the to the most obvious group of stars, but instead to the teams that are the most prepared as well as physically and mentally tough. This year's 15-under division presented strong evidence of that sentiment.

The Albany Capitals captured the 15-under bracket a 40-32 victory over Philly Triple Threat in the championship game in which not a single player on the winning team scored more than 10 points, eight different players had at least one basket and enough overall depth was on hand for coach Steve Lombard to make hockey-like full five-for-five substitutions throughout the contest.

The title was the second for the local AAU program in this event, adding this year's to a 2005 age-division crown earned in the GymRat CHALLENGE girls' inaugural event.

This year's work was just the continuation of some strong spring-season play by a group of talented players who mesh to seeming perfection as a unit. In other AAU stops to date this year the Capitals had been 14-2. But the GymRat event is different than the other events the Capitals had been in thus far in that it determines division champions, so this title was the Capitals' first of the AAU season.

And, maybe not the last if it can continue the type of play it showed here.

In the event's championship game Albany pulled away from an early 6-5 lead with a 27-10 stretch of dominance that created a 33-18 lead with 8:40 remaining. After that, it was just a matter of the clock winding down on a Capitals' championship performance.

The division's MVG (Most Valuable GymRat) Taliah Pounds, a 6-foot forward, finished with just six points in the championship contest. But, her all-around play on the boards, on defense and with smart overall play typified what the entire Capital team is about.

"We're the type team that on any given night almost any of our players can lead us," said Lombard. "I'm a strong believer in equal opportunity for everyone, and we're fortunate enough to have the type of depth where everyone can play a significant amount."

Depth isn't the Capitals' only strength. Defense, a word not always associated with AAU play, is also a prime component of the team's work.

"What was our key? Definitely our defense," said Pounds. "That's one part of our game that we work on a lot."

And the Capitals do plenty of work, practicing two or three times per week.

"It's easy to get everyone together," added Lombard. "Some AAU teams have kids from a wide geographic area. We've only got one player who lives out of the region."

It probably didn't hurt, either, that the tournament is in the Capitals' home area.

“It’s nice for our kids to sleep in their own beds,” said Lombard. “And, they know the area; they know where to go to eat after games and things like that.

“But the big thing is that they don’t fool around when they come to a tournament. When it comes to basketball, they’re all business.”

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

**Taliah Pounds, 6-0 Forward (Albany Capitals/Catholic Central H.S.):** She showed herself to be a post presence who plays physically and with athleticism at both ends of the court. Although she only scored six points in the championship game, her defensive work and rebounding efforts were invaluable. She also showed the ability to shoot out to the 15-foot range and to get the ball in the high post and drive and finish.

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

**Monaye Merrit 5-6 Point Guard (Philly Triple Threat/Friends Central School):** Very skilled point guard with an obviously high hoops IQ. Excellent ball-handler who possesses the requisite quickness to go past defenders and make things happen. Also a very solid shooter, right out to three-point territory.

**Queen Jackson 6-0 Forward (Philly Triple Threat/Trenton Catholic):** Very solid, well-built post presence. Showed the ability to catch the ball in traffic and finish off plays around the bucket. Plays very physical brand of basketball at both ends of the court. Also on display was a good shooting touch out to the foul line.

**Lea McClain 5-6 Point Guard (Albany Capitals/Mohonasen H.S.):** Excellent point guard skill on display throughout this event. Knows how to play the position. Excellent ball-handler and very good passer who sees the court and delivers to open teammates. Keeps defenses honest with shooting out to 3-point land.

**Courtney Lobo 5-9 Forward/Guard (CT Magic/St. Paul Catholic):** Nice pull-up jump shot. Capable of playing off-guard or small forward. Plays hard on defense and not afraid to crash the boards. Has great size for how she plays. At this level, capable of playing anywhere. Runs the floor well and has great court vision.

**Amanda Adamski 5-11 Center (CT Magic/Lewis Mills H.S.):** Strong with a solid physique. Works very hard in the post at both ends. Smart player who finds the open shot on offense. Very tough on the glass at both ends. Good passer out of the post area when well-defended. Also has a nice mid-range jumper.

**Chelsea Baez 6-0 Center/Forward (New Heights Blue/Riverside Country Day):** Uses size, strength to finish around the bucket. Also, multi-talented and capable of playing just about any position. Great shot-blocker and rebounder who can dominate under the hoop. Has a nice mid-range jumper, and also showed the ability to step out and hit the three.

**Tia Scott 5-6 Guard (New Heights Blue/Cardinal Spellman H.S.):** Great penetrator who has speed and a killer cross-over move. She is also very unselfish and will find anyone on the court.

Very active on the defensive end and her quickness results in many steals. Fantastic in transition where she can get to the hoop and finish.

**Cheyenne Jennings 5-4 Guard (Shamrocks/Wachusette Regional):** Very quick player who uses that to her advantage on both ends. Capable of creating her own shot off the dribble. Can shoot to 3-point range. Also attacks the hoop and can finish. Very good, strong rebounder for her size.

**Chelsea Cornelius 6-1 Forward/Guard (Firm AC/Crestwood H.S.):** Dead-eye marksman with unlimited range on her shot. Can play any position, including guard and has great size for that role. Uses her length to defend the post extremely well, as well as to effectively block shots.

**Alyesha Lovett 5-11 Forward/Guard (Gauchos Black/Shabazz H.S.):** Great size for an off-guard/small forward. She runs the floor extremely well. Very "long" and gets her hands on a lot of passes. Fantastic shot-blocker and rebounder. Has a nice mid-range jumper, and can slash her way to the hoop. Early interest from Georgia Tech, and several Big East schools.

**Starr Bredlove 5-4 Point Guard (Gauchos Black/Paterson Catholic):** Very quick player who can penetrate and finish around the basket. Very unselfish player who is at her best in transition. Uses her quickness well on the defensive end, and not afraid to hit the boards. Explosive player who can score when needed and is a great ball-handler.

**Shelia Johnson 5-7 Forward/Guard (Gauchos Black/East Orange H.S.):** A tenacious player who never stops hustling. Very versatile on offense, can play any position at this level. Smooth in the post and finishes. On the perimeter she has a quick first step that gets her past defenders. Also capable of handling the ball extremely well. Big East schools have shown interest.

**Sarah Royals 5-7 Guard (CT Spirit/Torrington H.S.):** Very good ball-handler who can play either guard spot. Runs the pick-and-roll to perfection. Has unlimited shooting range, and deadly as a foul-shooter, too. Nucleus for her team in this event. Can score at any given moment, and she makes things happen.

**Alyssa Barrett 5-7 Guard (CT Spirit/Berlin H.S.):** Showed outstanding skills as an off-guard. She has great range on her jumper, and not afraid to take and make big shots, even from three-point territory. Runs well with or without the ball. Aggressive, hustling player who also works hard on the defensive end.

**Jazmin Garcia 5-9 Forward (CAS Panthers/Peekskill H.S.):** Very athletic and strong inside player who uses those skills to be a great rebounder. Very tough around the basket and in the post. Also a very unselfish player who finds open teammates. Nice mid-range jumper and also showed ability to step out and hit from beyond the stripe.

**Najmah Tillard 5-3 Point Guard (CAS Panthers/Manhattan Center):** Does terrific work as a point guard. Very quick on both ends of the court, and uses that trait to go past defenders on offense and to cause problems on the defensive end. Can shoot the trey, but is also outstanding in the transition game.

**Emoni Cropper 5-8 Forward/Guard (CAS Panthers/Thomas Jefferson H.S.):** Good size for off-guard/small forward. Great defender. Slasher to the hoop, and strong enough to get there

and finish. Unlimited range on jumper, but also seems to enjoy creating contact inside. Good ball-handler, good enough to play the guard spt.

**Victoria Krantz 5-10 Forward (N.Y. Revolution/Buffalo Academy of Sacred Heart):** Plays with high energy level at all times. Real on-the-court leader both with actions and vocally. Extreme hustle, goes to the floor for every loose ball. Plays similarly hard on the offensive end, driving to the bucket and finishing strong.

**Bridget Andrews 5-7 Wing (N.Y. Revolution/Buffalo Academy of Sacred Heart):** Deadly sniper from the wing spot, one of the best shooters at this level in this event. Has unlimited range, and great touch from mid-range to long-range. Moves well without the ball. Knows how to get open, receive a pass and get off a shot.

**Taylor Rooks 5-11 Wing (N.Y. Revolution/Clarence Middle School):** Very gifted athletically, enabling her to play up a level. Just finishing eighth grade. Very skilled player for her youth. She has good size and uses it to attack the rim hard. Catches the ball easily while on the move, and can finish on the run.

**Sarah Pawlak 5-11 Center/Forward (N.Y. Revolution/Buffalo Academy of Sacred Heart):** Good, solid build who uses it to be an outstanding post player. Plays with extremely high energy. Has a very good post-up game that was effective here. Also capable of receiving on the wing, putting it on the floor and finishing.

**Alexa Palazzi-Leahy 5-8 Combo Guard (NE Crusaders/Chaverus Maine H.S.):** Very skilled player capable of playing either the point or the wing. Excellent ball-handler who gets to the rim with good dribble moves that put defenders on their heels. Has a good mid-range game, but also showed ability to step back and make 3's.

**Shaniqua Reece 5-7 Forward (Exodus Falcons/Thomas Jefferson H.S.):** Very good athlete who uses her speed and athleticism to be very effective from the forward spot. She slashes and attacks the rim hard and effectively. Also sees the floor well, using her skills to draw defenders and find open teammates.

**Anijali Moncrieffe 5-5 Combo Guard (Exodus Falcons/Bishop Ford H.S.):** Good, solid physique with speed. Very quick player goes past defenders and gets to the rim. Strong enough to finish when she gets there. Also has good point-guard skills, both in terms of ball-handling and finding open teammates and delivering the ball.

**Diani Mason 5-9 Wing (Exodus Falcons/Bishop Ford H.S.):** Tremendously talented player with the ball. She just produces offense. Great dribble moves getting to the rim. Does a great job finishing once she gets there. Still, she made some excellent passes after penetrating. Size and skill level indicates D-I interest will be there.

**Shanese Vaughn 5-9 Wing (Exodus Falcons/Bishop Ford H.S.):** A multi-talented versatile athlete who creates offense. Uses size and speed to slash to the basket and finish once there. Very good dribble-drive moves to go past defenders. Also showed ability to step out and make three-pointers.

**Katie Mahoney 5-9 Wing (CT Storm Premier/Bacon Academy):** Outstanding all-around player. She carried her team to this event's semifinal round both with her scoring and ball-

handling work. Exhibited an outstanding feel for how to play the game. Excellent shooter as well as a gifted scorer in other ways, too.

**Kelly Coleman 5-6 Wing (CT Storm Premier/Portland H.S.):** Key part of her team's success here in getting to the semifinal round. She scored points when her team needed them. Gets the ball on the high post and makes good decision. Above-average passer. Tremendous "glue" player who makes teammates better.

**Rachel McDaniel 5-6 Wing (All New Jersey Elite/Rutgers Prep):** Very good athlete who used her quickness and jumping ability to benefit her team. Flashed an above-average ability to attack the basket and finish once she gets there. Coach's delight ... she plays hard on both ends at all times.

**Samantha Guastella 6-1 Post/Forward (Jersey Shore Wildcats/Red Bank Catholic):** Very talented inside player who has skilled post moves. She can also put the ball on the floor, get to the rim and finish once there. Good shooting skills keeps defenses honest. Capable shooter out to the three-point stripe. Size and skills will bring D-I interest.

**Jaci Oskam 6-0 Wing (Albany Capitals/Bethlehem Central H.S.):** Very talented wing player, whose work helped her team win the division title. Excellent long-range shooter who handles the ball very well. She can take the ball on the rim and attack the rim. Smart player who is constantly on the move with or without the ball.

**Erin McDonnell 6-1 Post/Forward (New Jersey Panthers Blue/Kent Place School):** Excellent post player who uses her size well inside. Attacks the rim hard, whether with the ball or going after it. Finishes around the bucket. Also capable of stepping outside and drilling open shots out to three-point land.

**Khaleah Cooper 6-0 Wing (Philly Triple Threat/Girard College):** Very athletic wing player whose size and length gives her an advantage at the position. Excellent attacking the basket, getting there and finishing almost every time. Also showed above-average passing skills. Combination of size, athleticism and skills should attract D-I interest.

**Allison Setter 6-0 Forward (Albany Capitals/Shenendehowa H.S.):** Excellent college prospect as a forward. Multi-talented who doesn't have to score to be effective, but is capable of putting up points. Plays extremely hard at all time. Skilled post player who catches and finishes everything around the bucket.

**Kelsey Booth 6-1 Forward (CT Storm Premier/East Hampton H.S.):** Showed excellent potential as a forward. Good size, yet moves gracefully on the court. Plays good post defense. Battles extremely hard for rebounds, and gets them in traffic. Also showed perimeter skills and made big 3-pointers to help her team advance to semifinal round.

**Miah Register 5-9 Wing (Philly Triple Threat/Trenton Catholic H.S.):** Very skilled wing player with good size at the position. Excellent dribble-drive moves that freeze defenders and allows her to get to the basket to finish or create. Outstanding passer, particularly on the move. Capable enough outside shooter.

**Tehresa Coles 5-7 Wing (Albany Capitals/Colonie H.S.):** Tremendous athlete, one of the quickest players here at any level. Plays with great energy at all times. Wreaks havoc on the

defensive end. Good shooting touch, even out to 3-point range. Also possesses dribble skills that, when combined with quickness, enables her to go past defenders with ease.

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

Troi Melton 5-11 Forward (New Height Blue/Cardinal Spellman)  
Amber Griffin 5-10 Forward (New Height Blue/Cardinal Spellman)  
Anna Ross 5-7 Forward (Unity Wildcats/West Hill Middle School)  
Julia O'Connor 6-1 Center (New York City Heat/Mary Louis H.S.)  
Nyree Alston 5-3 Point Guard (New York City Heat/Bishop Loughlin)  
Laura Ann Dinan 5-6 Guard (Mass Frenzy/Monument Mountain H.S.)  
Alyssa LeValley 6-1 Forward (Rhode Island Lady Cyclones/Southkingstown H.S.)  
Addie Pendergast 6-3 Center (Rhode Island Lady Cyclones/The Prout School)  
Ashley McCaughan 5-1 Point Guard (Saratoga Sparks Orange/Niskayuna)  
Brittany Lewis 5-7 Guard (Exodus Falcons/Bishop Ford)  
Kelly Dixon 6-0 Center (CT Premier Storm/Bacon Academy)  
Rebecca Knight 5-11 Center (MBR/McAuley)  
Mary Badeen 5-4 Point Guard (MBR?Nokomis H.S.)  
Shannon Allan 6-0 Center (Albany Capitals/Warwick H.S.)  
Amanda Batzold 5-6 Guard (Albany Capitals/Columbia H.S.)  
Margaret Whelan 6-0 Center (Bay State Magic Elite (Nauset Regional)  
Sydney Ransom 5-8 Forward (Panthers Blue/Cardinal McCrick)  
Rachel McNair 6-1 Center (Rockland Rockets/Nyack H.S.)  
Aryria Godbold 5-7 Guard (Philly Triple Threat/Trenton Catholic)  
Linnet Graber 5-9 Forward (Garden State Sharpshooters/Gill St. Bernards)  
Samantha Graber 5-10 orwr (Garden State Sharpshooters/Gill St. Bernards)  
Annie Esposito 5-11 Center (Garden State Sharpshooters/Hanover Park)  
Briyana Pabon 5-3 Point guard (CT Spirit/Newington H.S.)  
Kaichie Ho 5-4 Guard (CT Spirit/Glastonbury H.S.)  
Tasia Nolan 5-10 Forward (CAS Panthers/Peekskill H.S.)

### **14:U Age Division: Murphy, Gauchos Rally To Earn Title**

Her teammates on the New York Gauchos use the nickname "Chicken" when referring to their 5-foot-6 point guard Tayshana Murphy.

"It's because I'm bowlegged and have skinny legs," said Murphy.

"Yeah, she's got legs like a chicken, but a game like LeBron James," said Gauchos' coach Harun Tolbert.

"I definitely don't play like a chicken," said Murphy. "Who do I play like? I just play like Tayshana Murphy."

And in the championship game of the 14-under division of the GymRat CHALLENGE tournament that was plenty good enough.

With her team down by 14 points late in the first half, still trailing by 12 at halftime and seemingly self-destructing in its title-game match-up with the New Jersey Northstars, Murphy used her

superior quickness and a variety of other court skills to help turn things around in the second half.

She scored her team's first three buckets on fearless drives to open the second half, quickly trimming the Gaucho's deficit to seven points. Later in the half, another driving hoop pulled the Gauchos to within four. Her two free throws with 4:18 remaining got her team to within two points.

Then, after four straight baskets by her teammate, guard Monique Cheek, tied things up with under two minutes left, Murphy converted a rebound basket to give the winners a 52-50 edge with 1:30 remaining.

The Northstars, who only had six players for the championship game, appeared worn down by then and didn't score again.

Murphy finished with 14 points and three assists in the final 14 minutes of the contest.

"At halftime I told the girls that this is what we train for," said Tolbert. "We don't rely on any one individual. Tayshana stepped up, but every one of our girls just worked hard and stepped up in the second half.

"We have a terrific program, but we're about more than basketball. We make sure the girls have good grades and good attitudes. We want our girls to move on to college, and we sell the girl as much as we sell the basketball player."

But the basketball side of things has always been strong within the storied Gauchos' program, and that was on display here once again in the 14-under bracket.

"We know this program's basketball reputation," said Murphy. "I'm a big believer in the Gauchos."

"We knew we could come back (from the halftime deficit) if we kept fighting. We worked too hard to get here to lose. We knew we could win if we just kept fighting."

Nothing chicken about that.

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

**Tayshana Murphy 5-6 Point Guard (N.Y. Gauchos-White/Bishop Laughlin H.S.):** Lightning-quick guard who makes things happen, either on her own or by creating opportunities for teammates. Can shoot the ball very well, can get to the basket and finish and knows when to dish off for scoring passes. She was at her best at key junctures. She had 14 second-half points in the championship game of this age bracket. Superb ball-handler with unstoppable cross-over dribble.

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

**Katie Reese 5-8 Point Guard (N.J. Northstars/Mountain Lakes High School):** She can shoot the "3" as well as get to the hoop seeming at will off the dribble. Finishes with either hand, or draws fouls. She is also savvy enough to draw defenders and dish to open teammates. Plays hard at all times. She is like a coach on the floor. An extremely valuable player.

**Samantha Tabakman 6-2 Center (N.J. Northstars/Peguannock H.S.):** Very good low-post player who finishes with either hand around the basket. Showed ability to make tough catches and, then, convert offensively. Gets to the foul line because of her strong inside game. Capable of blocking and altering shots. Rebounds well. Part of an exceptional inside-outside duo here, joining with teammate Katie Reese.

**Yuni Sher 5-11 Power Forward (Triple Threat N.Y./Spackenkill H.S.):** Very active and physical player. Gets to the hoop effectively and converts very well, using her strength to advantage. Also, uses her athleticism and physical abilities to defend well and aggressively. Plays hard at all times and should get even better as she gets older.

**Kelsey Glanzman 5-9 forward (L.I. Lightning Eve/Center Moriches H.S.):** Has a knack for the ball. Scores in transition, as well as being productive in the low post and along the baseline. Very aggressive, and draws fouls. She rebounds well, particularly on the offensive end, and makes good interior passes when she is well-defended.

**Aaliyah Lewis 5-3 Point Guard (Ring City Elite/I.S. 61 Middle School):** Lightning-quick guard who might have been the fastest player in this event. Can be extremely disruptive on the defensive end. Very quick hands resulting in numerous steals. Puts good pressure on the ball. Penetrates and dishes well while also causing havoc on the offensive end of the court. A young girl with great potential despite her size.

**Jada Matthews 5-10 Forward (Ring City Elite/Winslow Middle School):** Athletic player who finishes well around the basket. Rebounds well at both ends and makes good outlet passes. Smart player who uses her size, physical tools very well. She also does the little things that make a team better.

**Shirell Butler 5-4 Point Guard (CAS Douglass Panthers/Murry Bergtraum H.S.):** Sees floor very well, and delivers passes to open teammates. A very strong, aggressive point guard. She drives and dishes very well. Exhibited a nice “spin” dribble move. A very capable shooter, particularly from the top of the key. A difficult matchup at this level due to her physical maturity.

**Zaire O’Neal 5-11 Center (N.J. Sparks/Newark Middle School):** A crafty left-hander who likes to play in the high post. From there, she can get to the basket off the dribble. Very difficult to stop around the basket. Quite strong and can block shots. Has a bright future if she continues to work on her game.

**Emily Weber 5-8 Shooting Guard (Saratoga Sparks/Shenendehowa):** A very confident player who can shoot beyond the three-point stripe, or can drive to the basket. Very under control performer who lets the game come to her rather than trying to force things. A very valuable, multi-talented player.

**Lauren Woods 6-1 Center (Saratoga Sparks/Shaker High School):** Very good size, a solid physique. She posts up and seals well. Scores in the low post, but she can also face the basket and make mid-range jumpers. Keeps the ball high when she has possession around the hoop, eliminating deflections/turnovers. Very good “outlet” passer with good judgment. Fundamentally sound player.

**Johanna Dombrowski 5-5 Point Guard (Team BSB/ St. Mary’s Bayview Academy):** Toughest, most-aggressive player in this age division. Fearless player who attacks the defense every trip down court. Fearless “Blue Collar” performer. Only appeared in two games before suffering a minor injury and her team was not the same without her.

**Vandell Andrade 5-9 Forward (Team BSB/St. Mary's Bayview Academy):** Left-handed player with great moves around the basket. Very quick player who jumps well. Uses that skill particularly well to snare offensive rebounds. Very athletic and causes matchup difficulties because of her size and athleticism.

**Anjaleace White 6-2 Center (Ring City/Delran H.S.):** A very long lefty who blocks and alters shots due to her height and extremely long arms. Makes life on the court difficult for opponents around the hoop. Good rebounder who just needs to get a little stronger. Decent touch around the hoop. Can make short jumpers when open. Very good potential.

**Nahja Carter 5-3 Guard (CNBC N.J. Sting/Neptune H.S.):** A smooth, smart guard. Always seems to make the right decision with the ball. Plays under control while still being very competitive at both ends. Very quick and gets by defenders to get to the hoop and finishes well when she gets there.

**Raquel Scott 5-11 Power Forward (N.Y. Gauchos-White/I.H.A. High School):** Good scorer around the basket and in the paint. Can really post up. Very strong player who uses height and strength to be a good rebounder. Good, solid physique already. Makes good passes in the interior when well-defended.

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

Philandra Jordan 5-4 Point Guard (Cardinal King 14/Forest Park H.S.)  
Colleen Ames 5-8 Forward (L.I. Lightning Eve/Lindenhurst H.S.)  
Deja Bullock 6-1 Power Forward (Ring City Elite/Glen Landing Middle School)  
Brianah Ramos (Ring City Elite/Valley Central Middle School)  
Ashley Perez 5-9 Guard (Ct. Spirit/Manchester H.S.)  
Caroline Jadovich 5-10 Forward (Ct. Spirit/Midd Porters H.S.)  
Tracey Campbell 5-5 Guard (CNBC N.J. Sting/Wall H.S.)  
Chelsey Custodio 5-7 Small Forward (Baseline NYC/J.F. Kennedy H.S.)  
Jackie Dluhi 5-9 Forward (Jersey Shore Wildcats-Gannon/Middletown South H.S.)  
Brittany Fallon 5-4 Guard (Jersey Shore Wildcats-Gannon/Marlboro H.S.)  
Jazmine Hamlett 5-4 Guard/Forward (Exodus Lady Lions/St. Michael's Academy)  
Tyrese Purvis 5-9 Forward (Exodus Lady Lyons/Francis Lewis H.S.)  
Brianna Leonard 5-7 Guard/Forward (Mass. Hoops Jacquars/Amherst H.S.)  
Forbasaw Nkamebo 5-11 Forward (Mass Hoops Jacquars/Amherst H.S.)  
Mary Kate Cusack 5-5 Guard (Saratoga Sparks/Shenendehowa H.S.)  
Ali Lewis 5-5 Guard (Saratoga Sparks/Shenendehowa H.S.)  
Markesha Griffin 5-7 Small Forward (Higher Ground Warriors/Freire Charter H.S.)  
Tarya Vinson 5-4 Point Guard (Higher Ground Warriors/Freire Charter H.S.)  
Nicole Viselli 5-8 Shooting Guard (Bay State Blizzard-White/Pentucket H.S.)  
Kayla McAvoy 5-11 Center (Ct. Storm Premier/Id Saybrook H.S.)  
Shakirah 5-6 Guard (N.J. Sparks/Immaculate Conception H.S.)  
Dominique Vitalis 6-1 Center (N.Y. Gauchos-White-Gill/St. Bernard H.S.)  
Krystal Pearson 5-9 Forward (CAS Douglass Panthers/Harry S. Truman H.S.)  
Sade King 5-1 Guard (Ring City/Mt. Vernon H.S.)  
Ashanti Kennedy 5-8 Forward (Ring City/Alexander Hamilton H.S.)  
Asia Jackson 5-6 Guard (Ring City/Peakskill H.S.)  
Erika Brown 5-6 Point Guard (N.J. Sparks/N. Haledon Middle School)  
Najah Chambers 6-0 Center (N.J. Sparks/Paramus Catholic H.S.)  
Diana Malanga 5-5 Guard (CNBC-N.J. Sting/St. Rose H.S.)