

Blacktop Nation

Three games to play at recess (or, um, on your lunch hour)

SPUD

Played With: A ball, a relatively open space, at least three players

How to Play: An unaffiliated "number giver" assigns each player a secret number between one and the total number of players, and then chooses one player to be "it." The "it" throws the ball up in the air, and calls out a number. The player whose number was called is now "it" and must catch the ball, while everyone else flees. Ball in hand, "it" yells "Spud!", freezing the rest of the players. "It" then takes four steps toward any of the others and throws the ball at him. If a player is hit, he receives a letter (S, P, U, D) and is now "it"; if no one is hit, "it" receives a letter and throws the ball up for the next round. Once you've received all four letters in SPUD, you're out. The last non-SPUD wins.

BUTTS UP (also known as "Wall Ball" or "Asses Up")

Played With: A tennis or racquet ball, a wall, at least two players

How to play: One player begins by throwing the ball at the wall. After the ball hits the wall, everyone tries to catch it. If you catch the ball, the goal is to throw it at the wall before the other players touch the wall. If the ball hits the wall before a player touches it, that player has an "out." When a player receives three "outs," she must stand facing the wall, while another player throws the ball at her. You can save yourself an "out" however, by catching the ball off the wall on the fly, then hitting the wall with it before the original thrower can touch the wall.

KNOCKOUT

Played With: Two basketballs, one hoop, at least three players

How to play: Players line up behind the foul line, the first two players holding the basketballs. Player 1 shoots: If the ball goes in, Player 1 goes to the back of the line; he's still in the game. If he misses, he stays and watches Player 2 take a shot. If Player 2 makes a basket before Player 1, Player 1 is "knocked out." The last player in wins.

—Rebecca Messner

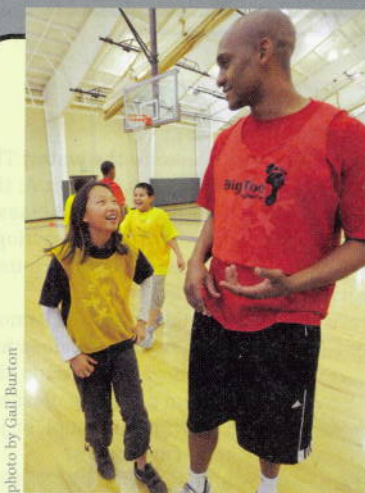


photo by Gail Burton

THE GAME OF LIFE

Can teamwork bridge cultural and racial divides?

It's Sunday afternoon, and in a classroom off the gymnasium at the Park School in North Baltimore, two Muslim girls

are tag-teaming an explanation of Eid ul-Fitr, the feast following Ramadan.

"Ramadan lasts for thirty days, and you fast—you're not allowed to eat anything," says the first.

"Between dawn and dark," adds the second.

"And when it's over, we all go to the mosque and pray together, we dress up really nice, and then they slaughter the animals."

"Not all the animals—just a sheep."

"Yeah, they slaughter a sheep. And then we eat it—nothing strange."

They manage this exchange at speeds only 10-year-old girls can reach, and their audience—about thirty other girls—watches intently. Next, a Jewish girl gives this description of Succot with a single breath: "We make like huts out of wood and we like live in them and it represents when the Jews were going out of Egypt and they didn't have a place to live so they like lived in huts."

The scene continues for a half an hour. It's remarkable: A group of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian kids, Hispanic and Korean kids, white and black kids, all sitting around a table talking about their cultures, their traditions, their lives. How is this possible?

"They think they're here to play basketball," says Chris Manfuso, 31, a clean-cut medical supplies salesman and one of this gathering's masterminds. In 2006, Manfuso and a couple of friends founded Be More, a nonprofit that uses sports to bring kids together across Baltimore's many social and racial divides. The program draws in 9- to 11-year-olds from around the city on four consecutive Sundays and scrambles them into teams for games of basketball, soccer, and capture the flag. Between the games, the kids give each other lessons on diversity—often inadvertently.

Steering today's discussion is Damien Davis, 27, a financial analyst by day and professional lacrosse player by night. "The kids don't know a lot about each other," he says. Through this program, he says, "they start to learn that people are different, and they'll respect differences. Eventually, we'll have better-working communities, better-working businesses."

Davis, Manfuso, and T. Rowe Price broker Mike Piccinino have been the driving forces behind the program. The spark came from Thibault Manekin, 29, who helped create Playing for Peace, an organization that uses the same sports-as-social-grease philosophy internationally. "Every time I came back from South Africa, the Middle East, or Northern Ireland, I would realize that Baltimore was more divided than any of these places," says Manekin, who recently started a socially responsible development firm with his father. (See "After-School Special," *Urbanite* December 2007.)

Be More has reached about 250 Baltimore school children. The Park School provides the facilities and rounds up the kids in buses, and the nonprofit Sports4Kids lends eighteen coaches to the cause. Down the road, says Manfuso, they would like to expand the program into the public schools.

"Right now, they think this is all about sports," says Manfuso, standing at the gym door. "They may not realize it's something bigger until they get older."

—Greg Hanscom